UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

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Lord in the Temple, Lord in the Tomb

The Hindu Temple and Its Relationship to the *Samādhi* Shrine Tradition of Jñāneśvar Mahārāj

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in Religious Studies

by

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हेतवे जगतामेव संसारार्णवसेतवे।
प्रभवे सर्वविद्यानां शम्भवे गुरवे नम:ञ

श्री गुरु गीता ३३

all my love and gratitude to
Asha, Oliver, & Lucian

I first visited the *samādhi* shrine of Jñāneśvar Mahārāj in the village of Āḷandī during the winter of 2001 at the end of a year-and-a-half stay in India. Though I only spent a morning there, the experience was quite profound, and I was genuinely moved by the notions of embodiment expressed through the space. I did not know then that this experience would prove a strong catalyst for my eventual commitment to the study of sacred space at the graduate level, nor did I know that this space would subsequently become the focus of my doctoral dissertation. Thus, it is only fitting that my first debt of gratitude be paid to Jñāneśvar himself, whose powerful presence in Āḷandī has been the inspiration for much of my studies thus far on sacred space.

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I owe a special thanks to John Cort whose classes at Denison University I was fortunate enough to takeover while he was on an NEH sabbatical leave over the 2012-2013 academic year. I was even more fortunate that John chose to stay in town for most of that year while writing, and so I benefited from his frequent presence in the office next to mine. John was generous enough to read drafts of several chapters of this dissertation, and his thoughtful insight, recommendations, and general comments proved invaluable to its development. I am deeply grateful for John's mentorship over that year and his continued guiding hand in regard to my work.

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due to Pune's proximity to Āḷandī. I owe a special thanks to my wonderful Marathi teachers, Sujata Mahajan and Shantanu Kher, who were not only exceptional language teachers, but who also made great strides in establishing critical contacts for me regarding my project. I especially want to thank them for introducing me to Sadanand More, who generously hosted several of us in Dehu and took the time to speak with me about my project. I also want to acknowledge the extended staff at AIIS Pune, most fondly those who cooked our wholesome lunches. I was extremely fortunate to receive an AIIS Junior Research Fellowship to support my field work during the 2010-2011 academic year. For their guidance and support of my project and for genuinely and thoughtfully looking after me and my family during this research trip, I want to thank Anil Inamdar at AIIS Pune and Purnima Mehta, Purushottama Bilimale, and Philip Lutgendorf at AIIS Delhi. Additionally, I especially want to thank Elise Auerbach for her tireless administration of AIIS from its home office in Chicago. During my research sojourn, I benefited from several archival libraries in Pune. I most notably want to thank the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, the Library of Archaeology at Deccan College, and the Pune University Library.

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ABSTRACT

Lord in the Temple, Lord in the Tomb

The Hindu Temple and Its Relationship to the *Samādhi* Shrine Tradition of Jñāneśvar Mahārāj

by

Mark Joseph McLaughlin

"Lord in the Temple, Lord in the Tomb" is a sustained analysis of Hindu *samādhi* shrine burial practice and its relation to broader Hindu temple traditions. The study is structured as a two-part exploration of Hindu sacred space. Part I is an extended study of the development of Hindu temple traditions, from their roots in Vedic ritual structures to their full flowering in the ideology of temple design delineated in the Vāstu-Śāstras and Śilpa-Śāstras. Central to the development of the Hindu temple is the understanding of the space as pervaded by the living presence of the deity who is housed within in the form of a *mūrti* (sculpted image). I provide a sustained analysis of two particular temple traditions, one Śaiva and one Vaiṣṇava—the Mīnākṣī-Sundareśvara temple complex in Madurai and the Viṭṭhal temple compound in Paṇḍharpur—to illustrate how the understanding of the temple as a "living space"

dictates the manner in which the space is interacted with over time, leading to what I call a mythico-historical personality of place. I highlight the process by which the temple space is continually re-inscribed with new layers of meaning through the devotees' repeated encounters with that space over time.

In part II of my study, I consider the *samādhi* shrine as an expression of sacred space, which contributes to our knowledge of a prevalent and significant form of sacred space in the Indian religious milieu that has received relatively little attention. The study specifically concerns the s*amādhi* shrine compound of Jñāneśvar Mahārāj (thirteenth century C.E.), the founding *guru* of the Vārkarī tradition, and to a certain extent, the broader network of s*amādhi* shrines associated with the this Maharashtrian *bhakti* movement. I argue that the Vārkarī tradition's understanding of the perfected body of the realized saint, as expressed by Jñāneśvar himself, allows for the saint's body to be revered as a *mūrti* and the space of the surrounding *samādhi* shrine to function as a particular kind of temple. Moreover, I show that, as in the case of the Mīnākṣī-Sundareśvara and Viṭṭhal temples discussed in Part I, this understanding of the *samādhi* shrine as a "living space" dictates the manner in which the space is engaged with by its devotees over time, generating a particularized mythico-historical personality of place. In extension, I posit that the *samādhi* shrines of the Vārkarī tradition form a dynamic network of sacred sites that is anchored at its hub by the Viṭṭhal Temple in Paṇḍharpur and constitute a complex sacred geography that traverses the entire landscape of Maharashtra.

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Introduction

On the western edge of the Deccan Plateau in Maharashtra, near the bustling town of Pune, sits the small village of Āḷandī. In the center of this small village there is a temple compound inside of which are several shrines, one of which dominates. The daily schedule of the compound revolves around this central shrine. Rituals begin at this shrine in the morning with the usual waking up of the *mūrti* (divine form), followed by the ritual bathing, feeding, and worship of the *mūrti* through *pūjā* offerings, and culminating in *darśan*, in which worshipers are blessed with the auspicious sight of the *mūrti*. In the evening the regimen is repeated, concluding with bedtime rituals for the *mūrti*—nothing out of the ordinary, all standard temple rituals. However, even though this is a temple compound, the central principle shrine of the complex around which virtually all ritual activity revolves is not centered on a *mūrti* of a Hindu god. Rather, what sits at the heart of this "temple" is a body—the

entombed body of Jñāneśvar Mahārāj, the founding *guru* of the Vārkarī movement—for this is not a temple in the traditional sense. It is a *samādhi* shrine, a tomb-shrine.

In Hindu traditions, a *guru* such as Jñāneśvar is revered as one who has become permanently established in the absolute; he is liberated, a realized sage. He may be called a *siddha* (a perfected being), a *satguru* (a true *guru*), or a *sant* (one who has realized the truth). A Hindu *samādhi* shrine marks the final resting-place of such a realized *guru*'s body and reflects the traditional understanding that the perfected body of a realized sage is a purified expression of absolute consciousness and therefore should not be cremated but rather should be preserved as a localized instantiation of sacred power. This in itself is significant, as it is one of the only instances in Hindu traditions in which a body is buried rather than cremated.[1] Even more remarkable is the fact that the *samādhi* shrine of a realized sage functions in much the same way as a Hindu temple. The ritual practices that are generally directed toward the deity of a temple are in this case directed toward the realized sage whose body is entombed in the *samādhi* shrine. *Samādhi* shrines and the ritual practices associated with them are prevalent throughout India. Anyone who has spent time in India knows that Hindu pilgrims who frequent temples generally include *samādhi* shrines as part of their pilgrimage to sacred sites. Yet one would not know this from the academic scholarship pertaining to sacred sites in India. The temple traditions of

[1] Other instances that may require burial as opposed to cremation include the death of young children, pregnant women, and those dying violent deaths. See for example, Kane 1974: 938-942; Pandey 1969: 256-57. In addition, many scheduled caste communities also practice burial of their dead.

India have been the focus of much scholarship over the years. The architectural design and structure of temples, their daily practices, their social organization, and their political roles have often been the subject of academic inquiry. *Samādhi* shrines, on the other hand, have received relatively little attention.

This study will trace the roots of the *samādhi* shrine tradition and inquire how it is that the body of a realized sage or *guru* can be revered in the same manner as a *mūrti* in a temple. More specifically, it will consider how these notions of *guru* as *mūrti* and tomb as temple impact the spatial layout of the *samādhi* compound of Jñāneśvar Mahārāj and how this spatial layout contributes to the devotee's negotiation with his perceived presence within the space. Yet before we can unpack the *samādhi* shrine in this regard, we must first come to terms with the Hindu temple. Part 1 of this study comprises three chapters (chapters 1, 2, 3) that will examine the meanings, structure, and functions of the Hindu temple. Part 2 comprises three chapters (chapters 4, 5, 6) that will unpack the development of the practice of *samādhi* burial and will utilize our understanding of the Hindu temple as a lens through which to explain how Jñāneśvar's *samādhi* shrine functions as a special kind of temple.

If there is any doubt concerning the importance of temple construction and consecration in Hindu traditions, one must only look to the contents of the core liturgical texts of these traditions—the Purāṇas, Śaiva Āgamas, Vaiṣṇava Saṃhitās, and Śākta Tantras. Here we have entire sections dedicated to the purpose, process, and benefits of properly constructing and consecrating temples as well as the

consequences that will result if the proper rules and rites are not followed.[2] Thus, it must be recognized that the establishment of temples is a central concern for these traditions.

Architecture has a long history in India, reaching back well beyond the onset of the temple tradition in the early part of the first millennium BCE. The Vāstu-Śāstras and Śilpa-Śāstras are the technical treatises for all forms of architecture—from temporary structures, pavilions, halls, houses, and water-tanks to palaces, temples, towns, and villages. These texts are critical manuals for the *sthapati* (architect) and function as the canon for all architectural undertakings. When these manuals are wedded with the core liturgical texts of the various sectarian traditions previously mentioned, we have the recipe books for the construction of individual temples dedicated to any one of a variety of deities who, if everything is performed correctly, will take up residence and actually become embodied in the physical structure created for him or her.[3]

This tradition of ritual construction of sacred space harks back to the Vedic period and its concern with the ritual construction of the temporary sacrificial field, and in particular the Vedic fire altar.[4] The foundation of all architectural design, as dictated by the Vāstu-Śāstras, rests on a grid diagram termed the *vāstupuruṣamaṇḍala*. As temple traditions develop, this *maṇḍala* becomes conflated

[2] Dagens 1984: 1-2, 1.1.
[3] Kramrisch 1946: 359.
[4] This is a continuous theme running through both volumes of Kramrish's analysis of the Hindu temple. See, for example, Kramrisch 1946: 71.

with the Puruṣa of Ṛg-Veda 10.90 embedded within the Vedic fire altar. Thus, in the manner of the Vedic fire altar, the temple becomes a reconstitution of the original sacrifice of the primordial Puruṣa. Chapter 1 of this study will trace out these Vedic roots embedded in the ritual construction of the temple structure itself.

While the temple can be understood as homologous to the Vedic fire altar—even descended from it—there is one striking difference, and this difference rests at the core of the temple structure. Unlike the Vedic fire altar, the temple is dedicated to a specific deity who takes up residence in the center of its inner sanctum, from where the deity radiates his or her presence out through the entire temple compound. In this manner, the deity is understood to be a living presence both in and through the temple. Chapter 2 of this study will consider the process by which the deity becomes instantiated in the space of the temple using the example of a Śiva temple. We will trace the construction and installation of the *mūrti* and Śiva's eventual embodiment within it, as well as his embodiment within the temple at large, through an investigation of the architectural treatises on temple building, the Vāstu-Śāstras and Śilpa-Śāstras, and their accompanying Āgamic texts. Where necessary I have highlighted in the footnotes of chapter 2 any significant differences that distinguish Vaiṣṇava methods of constructing and installing *mūrti*s of Viṣṇu from those employed in Śaiva traditions.

It is clear from Hindu liturgical texts and architectural treatises that a temple space is understood as the embodied presence of the deity who is housed within, and the deity is ritually interacted with as a living being. In these texts we are presented

with the paradigmatic temple and its functioning. What happens when one of these models is instantiated in a particular place over a period of time? How is this notion of living presence expressed and encountered throughout the temple's history? The understanding of the particular expression of divine embodiment within a space has a profound impact on the manner in which a practitioner engages with his or her deity in that space. Chapter 3 of this study will consider these questions through an exploration of the embodied notions associated with two particular temple compounds: one Śaiva, the Śrī Mīnākṣī-Sundareśvara Temple in Madurai, Tamil Nadu; and the other Vaiṣṇava, the Viṭṭhal Temple compound in Paṇḍharpur, Maharashtra. Through these two case studies we will find that over time each deity takes on a particular mythico-historical "personality of place," which is expressed through the structural orientation of the space that in turn governs the devotee's interactions with the space. This notion of a mythico-historical personality of place is not meant to imply that my project is historical in nature. Rather, the term reflects the manner in which select historical events are understood in relation to existing mythological narratives in a given tradition. This personality of place both shapes and is shaped by the encounter between mythological and historical forces as communities of a given living tradition attempt to negotiate and at times reconcile their existence through constructed memories that reflect a continuity between their mythological narratives, theological perspectives and events on the ground.

In part 2 of this study our attention turns to *samādhi* shrines. Chapter 4 traces the development of the structures and practices associated with Hindu *samādhi* burial.

The chapter considers three significant elements regarding the passing of a realized sage in Hindu traditions: the manner in which the sage is said to leave the body, the manner in which the body is buried, and the manner in which the burial site is marked.

Chapter 5 turns to the figure of Jñāneśvar himself, and begins with a consideration of the historical sources pertaining to Jñāneśvar and the controversies surrounding them. I then move to a con textualization of Jñāneśvar and his teachings among the broader Nāth Yogi traditions through which he traces his own lineage. I discuss the shift from *samādhi* burial site to *samādhi* worship with a Hindu temple structure oriented on a daily Hindu ritual schedule and argue for the influence from the parallel devotional complex of the Sufi *dargāh* tradition based on its coinciding arrival in India and more specifically Maharashtra.

Chapter 6 begins with a brief analysis of Jñāneśvar's own understanding of the special status of the realized *guru* as a localized embodiment of absolute consciousness in order to explain how his body functions as a *mūrti*. Having established that certain Hindu traditions—and the Vārkarī tradition in particular—revere the perfected body of the realized *guru* as a special kind of *mūrti*, the chapter then analyzes Jñāneśvar's *samādhi* compound in Āḷandī as a special kind of temple and examines the emergence over time of a mythico-historical personality of place anchored in the perceived living presence of Jñāneśvar in his entombed body. By reading the Vārkarī tradition's narrative of the space in relation to the physical layout of the *samādhi* compound and the ritual interactions taking place there, I seek to

illuminate the dynamics through which devotees engage with Jñāneśvar's *mūrti* as a localized form of the formless absolute.

Review of Sources

The primary sources within the Vedic canon that deal directly with the description of the *agnicayana*, the Vedic Soma ritual par excellence, are the Brāhmaṇas and Śrauta-Śūtras—most notably, the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa, which dedicates five out of its fourteen books to the discussion of this ritual.[5] I have drawn from the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa as well as several secondary sources specific to the *agnicayana* ritual—the works of Frits Staal, Charles Malamoud, Christopher Minkowski, Herman Tull, and P. V. Kane.

In the Indian corpus the earliest surviving writings dealing with architecture are found in sections of texts of the Purāṇic tradition. These include, among others, the Matsya Purāṇa (ca. fourth century CE), the Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa (ca. fifth-sixth century CE), the Bṛhat Saṃhitā (ca. sixth century CE), and the Agni Purāṇa (ca. ninth century CE).[6] All of these texts have several chapters devoted to temple construction and consecration, with the Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa being the most extensive. By the medieval period we find that these Purāṇic sections on architecture become developed into full-fledged technical treatises employed by the *śilpa* schools (sculptural and architectural guilds): the Vāstu-Śāstras and Śilpa-Śāstras. Stella Kramrisch provides an extensive list of these texts in the source list of her

[5] Kane 1974: 1246; Malamoud 1996: 58-59.
[6] For a detailed overview of the ongoing debate regarding the dates of the various Purāṇas, see Rocher 1986.

monumental work, *The Hindu Temple*.[7] In the Śaiva tradition the most important of these are the Mānasāra (eleventh-twelfth century CE) and the Mayamatam (eleventh-twelfth century CE). A later text that becomes the standard reference in Kerala is the Tantrasamuccaya (fifteenth century CE). Most of the Vāstu-Śāstras and Śilpa-Śāstras are considered to have been passed down through lineages stretching back to their divine source and are therefore considered to be revealed texts much like the Āgamas and Tantras. The *Śilpaprakāśa*, a twelfth-century Orissan text, is an exception, as its author is known to be an actual architect. Although this text is from the Śākta tradition and deals primarily with Devī temples, it gives us a unique look into an actual medieval *śilpa* school.[8]

As mentioned earlier, when it comes to temple construction, the architectural manuals must be consulted in tandem with certain liturgical texts.[9] This collaboration is so important that disclaimers can be found in many of the liturgical texts warning of the dangers of building a temple without consulting them. The Kāmika-Āgama, a Śaiva liturgical text, bluntly proclaims, "One should perform [the ritual construction and consecration of a temple] . . . according to a root treatise (*mūlāgama*) only; if performed according to a subsidiary treatise (*upāgama*), builder and sponsor will be destroyed."[10] In the Śaiva tradition these root treatises that deal with the consecration rites of the temple and the Śiva *mūrti*s housed within them are called Śaiva Āgamas.

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[7] Kramrisch 1946: 440-41.

[8] Śilpaprakāśa 2005.

[9] For a list of many of these texts across sectarian lines, see Kramrisch's sources under Āgama and Tantra, in Kramrisch 1946: 439-40.

[10] Kāmika-Āgama 1.104-7, as quoted by Richard Davis. See Davis 1991: 20.

Typically, a Vāstu-Śāstra will have one primary Āgama that is attached to it. Kapila Vatsyayan explains, "The *Mayamatam* . . . complements material in the *Kāmikāgama* . . . and the two should be seen together, because while the text on architecture details the techniques of construction, the *Āgama* texts lay down the process by which the material is transubstantiated to a non-material plane."[11] Many of the Vāstu-Śāstras provide textual evidence of this relationship with the Āgamas. The Mānasāra, for example, has several verses that refer the reader to its accompanying Āgama.[12] These liturgical texts are traditionally composed of four sections—*vidyāpāda, kriyāpāda, caryāpāda,* and *yogapāda*. Of these four sections, it is the *kriyāpāda* that the *sthapati* turns to, as it deals directly with temple construction and consecration.[13] Some of the principal Śaiva Āgamas utilized in temple construction and consecration are the Kāmika-Āgama, the Kāraṇa-Āgama, the Somaśambhupaddhati, the Īśānaśivagurudevapaddhati, the Ajita-Āgama, and the Raurava-Āgama.[14]

The texts mentioned earlier that pre-date the medieval period—the Matsya Purāṇa, the Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa, the Bṛhat Saṃhitā, and the Agni Purāṇa—have proved useful sources for this study. The most recognized Vāstu-Śāstras that are

[11] *Mayamatam* 1994: viii.
[12] See Mānasāra 52.
[13] Dagens 1984: 1-2, 1.1.
[14] On the principle Āgamas utilized for temple construction and worship, see the introduction to Davis 1991: 3-21. N. R. Bhatt provides a list of what he feels are the most important Āgamas relating to the *liṅga*, see Ajita-Āgama 1964: v. 1, 17. Also see his extensive list in Raurava-Āgama 1972: v. 2, 14.

employed by the Śaiva tradition—the Mayamatam and the Mānasāra—are the principal Vāstu-Śāstras that I have consulted.[15]

As Vatsyayan has noted, the Āgamic companion for the Mayamatam, as well as for the Mānasāra, is the Kāmika-Āgama. Working with this text is somewhat problematic due to the lack of a systematic critical edition, as Bruno Dagens has indicated in his comments about why he chose to undertake an analysis of the Ajita-Āgama and Raurava-Āgama instead of the Kāmika-Āgama or the Kāraṇa-Āgama.[16] However, the Somaśambhupaddhati (eleventh century) is cited by Helene Brunner as an important and comprehensive text on matters of *liṅga* installation and consecration.[17] Brunner notes that the chapters on *liṅgapratiṣṭhā* (*liṅga* installation) in the Somaśambhupaddhati are identical to the ones in the Agni Purāṇa.[18] In this regard, the Agni Purāṇa is also a reliable source for *liṅga* installation rites. I have also consulted several Vaiṣṇava Saṃhitās derived from the Pāñcarātra and Vaikhānasa schools, as the concept of the embodiment process in temple consecration is relatively similar across sectarian lines. In this regard, I have found most helpful H. Daniel Smith's *A Descriptive Bibliography of the Printed Texts of the Pāñcarātrāgama* and

[15] Both of these texts have been translated into English—the Mayamatam superbly so by Dagens in 1994, and the Mānasāra to a lesser degree by Acharya in 1934. See Mayamatam 1994; Mānasāra 1980.
[16] Dagens 1984: 3-4, 1.3.
[17] Brunner 1998: 88.
[18] Somaśambhupaddhati 1998: 2, n.*; 68, n.*; 190, n.*. These correspond to Agni Purāṇa 92-95; 97.

Teun Goudriaan's annotated translation of the *Kāśyapajñānakāṇḍa*, a Vaikhānasa ritual handbook.[19]

The primary sources for any specific Hindu temple are that temple's Sthala-Purāṇas. These are the tradition's mythico-historical accounts of the temple's founding and development, which are compiled and preserved by the temple priests. In the case of the Mīnākṣī-Sundareśvara Temple, there are two principal Sthala-Purāṇas: Sthala Varalāru and Sthānikar Varalāru. A. V. Jeyechandrun notes, "*Sthala Varalāru* recorded important political events and traced the succession of monarchs while *Sthānikar Varalāru* in addition to recording political successions dealt with the duties, rights, honours that devolved on the priests."[20] While Sthala-Purāṇas of the Viṭṭhal Temple in Paṇḍharpur must exist, I have not been able to access them. However, the temple does have its own *Māhātmya*, the Pāṇḍuraṅga Māhātmya, which appears in three different versions associated, respectively, with the Skanda, Padma, and Viṣṇu Purāṇas.

Regarding the practice of *samādhi* burial, although *samādhi* shrines have been discussed in the work of such scholars as George Briggs (1982: 39-43), David White (1996: 93-94, 2009: 205-207), Antonio Rigopoulos (1993), and Charlotte Vaudeville (1974), none of these works provides an extended analysis of *samādhi* shrines. My study provides the first sustained investigation of *samādhi* shrines and their implications for our understanding of Hindu constructions of sacred space. I

[19] H. D. Smith 1975; *Kāśyapajñānakaṇḍa* 1965.
[20] Jeyechandrun 1985: 107.

consulted Sanskrit sources dealing with death and death rituals (*śrāddha*, *antyeṣṭi*) found in the Vedic Āraṇyakas, Upaniṣads, Mahābhārata, Bhagavad Gītā, Dharma Śāstras, medieval Gītā commentaries, and medieval texts pertaining to ascetic institutions and ideologies. I also examined discussions of markers for mortuary remains found in the Vāstu-Śāstras and Śilpa-Śāstras references to *stūpa*s in sources from the Pāli Canon.

Regarding Jñāneśvar, first and foremost are those texts composed by Jñāneśvar himself, most notably the *Jñāneśvarī* and *Anubhavāmṛta*.[21] Due to Jñāneśvar's belonging to a Nāth lineage, contemporary Sanskrit texts related to the early Nāth tradition are critical for understanding and contextualizing Jñāneśvar's teachings. Of particular importance are the *Kaulajñānanirṇaya* of Matsyendranāth (ca. 900-950), the *Gorakṣaśataka* and *Siddhasiddhāntapaddhati* of Gorakṣanātha (ca. 1000-1250), as well as texts associated with the Paścimāmnāya (Western Transmission School) of the Kaula Tantra traditions, particularly the *Mālinīvijayottaratantra* (ninth century), and the *Kubjikāmatatantra* (eleventh century).

In terms of Vārkarī sources much scholarship has been written on the Vārkarī tradition, but most of the scholarship pertains to the lives of its saints and the poetry left behind by them. Some scholars have focused on broad surveys of the tradition (Deleury 1960; Ranade 2003; Tulpule 1979; Zelliot 1987), while others have chosen

[21] This text is also called *Amṛtānubhava* as this is how Nāmdev referes to it in the *Nāmdev Gāthā*. However, I use *Anubhavāmṛta* as this is how the text refers to itself and its meaning, "the nectar of direct experience", reflects Jñāneśvars perspective in the text. On this matter, see Kiehnle 1997b: 2, n. 3.

to focus on one particular figure, such as Nāmdev (Novetzke 2008), Eknāth (Abbott 1981; Zelliot 2003; Keune 2011), or Chokhāmeḷā (Zelliot 1995). Still others have been concerned with the annual pilgrimage to the Viṭṭhal temple in Paṇḍharpur (Karve 1962; Mokashi 1987; Engblom 1987; Zelliot 1987; Dhere 2011).

None of the scholarship on the Vārkarī tradition has provided a sustained analysis of the *samādhi* shrines of its saints. The only significant discussion of Vārkarī sacred space beyond the Viṭṭhal Temple of Paṇḍharpur is Vaudeville's (1974) article on Paṇḍharpur itself, and while she mentions the *samādhi* shrines of the major saints of the tradition as well as their locations, the main thrust of her article focuses on the Viṭṭhal Temple and other sites related to Viṣṇu in the area. My study contributes to an understanding of the sacred geography of the Vārkarī tradition by providing a sustained investigation of the structure and functions of the Jñāneśvar *samādhi* compound in Āḷandī along with a brief consideration of the other Vārkarī *samādhi* shrines that form a network around the central hub in Paṇḍharpur.

Field Research and Methodological Considerations

Chapter 5 of my study considers the sacred geography of the Vārkarī tradition that interconnects the network of *samādhi* shrines associated with the Vārkarī poet-saints and the central hub, the Viṭṭhal Temple in Paṇḍharpur. This phase of my research draws on filed research and archival research that I conducted in Maharashtra from June to August in 2009, and from November 2010 to March 2011.

My field research in Maharashtra focused, first, on an in-depth analysis of Jñāneśvar's *samādhi* compound in Āḷandī and its relation to the Viṭṭhal Temple. As

the founding *guru* of the Vārkarī movement, Jñāneśvar is the most significant figure in the tradition, and thus a sustained study of his *samādhi* compound is critical to an understanding of Vārkarī sacred geography. Second, I investigated the *samādhi* shrines of the other major Vārkarī poet-saints in Paṇḍharpur (Puṇḍalīk, Nāmdev, Cokhāmeḷā, and Janābāī), Tryambakeśvar (Nivṛttināth), and Paiṭhaṇ (Eknāth) as well as the sites in Dehu associated with Tukārām. My investigations took into account the relation of each shrine to the Viṭṭhal Temple and to the broader network of *samādhi* shrines.

My field research on the Jñāneśvar's *samādhi* compound in Āḷandī involved mapping the physical layout of the compound and conducting informal interviews with practitioners at the site, including caretakers of the shrines, local devotees, and pilgrims. My study also included careful observation of the *samādhi* compound over time in order to record the dynamics of worship and patterns of movement through the space throughout the day and the seasons.

My archival reseach took me to the halls of the Bandharkar Oriental Research Institute (BORI) in Pune, where I consulted Marathi primary sources, Sthala-Purāṇas, Māhātmyas, and donation records associated with Jñāneśvar's *samādhi* compound in Āḷandī and the Viṭṭhal Temple in Paṇḍharpur. I also collected various print publications and othere media sold at the sites, including hagiographies, pilgrimage literature, photographs, and audio recordings of chants.

In order to understand a sacred space, one must become steeped in the tradition that created it. A scholar must prepare by reading the available primary and

secondary literature pertaining to the tradition. Yet in the end the space itself has to be understood as the primary text—not simply the structures that make up the space but the activities that take place in and around the space as well. A scholar of sacred space must spend time in the space the way a textualist spends time in the text. Only by observing the space as it moves through the day and the seasons, and as the day and the seasons move through it, can one hope to understand the life of the space. My methodological approach to the study of sacred space builds on Lindsay Jones's work *The Hermeneutics of Sacred Architecture*.[22] Drawing on the hermeneutical approaches of Hans-Georg Gadamer, Paul Ricoeur, and reader-response theorists of literary criticism, Jones understands the meanings of a sacred space to exist in the relationship between the devotee and the space. In my own approach the practitioner's perspective is critical in that it is informed by the tradition that generated the space while at the same time the practitioner's perspective invests the space with new meanings that in turn become part of the ongoing cumulative tradition. In other words, the meanings of a space are not predetermined and stagnant but dynamic and alive in the practitioner's ongoing encounters with it.

[22] See Jones 2000.

PART I

The Hindu Temple

CHAPTER 1
Ideology of Temples

In his analysis of the hermeneutics of sacred architecture, Jones discusses where he feels the activating mechanism in a work of architecture lies. He comments, "Where sacred architecture 'works' . . . , devotees do not stand over, above, or outside the elements of the built context in which they worship. Rather, where architecture succeeds, ritual participants and built forms are engaged as partners in a hermeneutical conversation or as players in a hermeneutical game."[23] Drawing on reader-response theorists of literary criticism, who argue that a literary work comes into existence when the text and reader meet, Jones's point is that the sacred space of a temple comes into being during and through the devotee's experience of it. Temple architecture is a dynamic interwoven mechanism for the being moving through it. The devotee is a participant in the space, not a spectator of it. Its meaning thus lies in the delicate interface between person and building. Jones further states, "The locus of meaning resides neither in the building itself (a physical object) nor in the mind of the beholder (a human subject), but rather in the negotiation or the interactive relation

[23] Jones 2000: 47.

that subsumes both building and beholder—in *the ritual-architectural event* in which buildings and human participants alike are involved."[24]

Jones is not the first to conceptualize sacred architecture as a ritual event. In fact it appears that this seemingly modern understanding has ancient roots in India, for this concept of architecture as ritual has been embedded in the design of the Hindu temple from its inception. Early temple designers drew inspiration not so much from other building traditions but rather from the richly developed ancient tradition of the Vedic fire sacrifice, or *yajña*, and the roles of the ritual players in that sacrifice. Thus, it is ritual itself that served as the model for temple architecture as it developed in India. This ritual of the Vedic fire sacrifice, and more specifically the *agnicayana* ritual, is infused in and wholly permeates the structure and functions of the Hindu temple. The earliest examples of Hindu temple traditions date from the early centuries of the first millennium CE. The Buddhist and Jain temple traditions predate these by a number of centuries, and although they exerted some influence on Hindu temple structures, it is the long established Vedic sacrificial tradition, of which the Hindu tradition is seen as a successor of sorts, that primarily influenced the intention and direction of Hindu temple design.

This earlier Vedic ritual tradition did not have permanently established sacred spaces. Rather, a temporary sacred space would be constructed through the act of the ritual, for the duration of the ritual, and then would be deconstructed once the ritual was over. In a similar manner, the whole life of a temple—beginning with its initial

[24] Jones 2000: 41, emphasis Jones's.

ground breaking, on through its construction, and beyond to its day-to-day maintenance—is regarded as a series of ritual acts. Thus, the temple becomes concretized ritual, a ritual that each devotee participates in through the experience of tangibly moving through the space. It will be shown that the identity of the devotee, the identity of the temple, and the identity of the deity are intimately woven together in the ritual ground of this sacred space that is the Hindu temple. In this section of the analysis we will explore the Vedic roots of Hindu temple architecture. What aspects of the *agnicayana* fire altar are embodied within the temple proper? How do the temple patron, devotee, and architect relate to the ritual players of the Vedic sacrifice—the sacrificer, the sacrificer's wife, and the priests? And how is the Vedic sacrificial field itself reflected in the layout of the larger Hindu temple compound? These questions will be explored at length.

The Vedic Fire Altar

The *agnicayana* is regarded as the paradigmatic Vedic fire sacrifice, the center of which focuses on the "piling up" of the fire altar. It is this fire altar and the integral relationship of the sacrificer, or *yajamāna*, to it that exerts the greatest influence on the Hindu temple. The *agnicayana* fire altar is an apparently simple construction consisting of five layers of brick topped by a fire. Yet, as we shall see, this altar is a complex multi-layered structure that interweaves different forms of embodiment. As we move through the major components of the temple, we will unpack this five-layer altar and reveal how the multiple forms of embodiment in the fire altar are transferred into the act of construction and worship with regard to the Hindu temple. Our

exploration of the various aspects of the Hindu temple will progress in a similar fashion to its construction—that is, we will start at the bottom and work our way up.

The Vedic fire altar of the *agnicayana* sacrifice is viewed as an embodiment of the *yajamāna* as well as an embodiment of the fire god Agni, who is identified with the creator principle, the Puruṣa Prajāpati. Prajāpati's body, which becomes dissipated through his act of cosmic creation, is ritually reconstituted by the piling up of the fire altar. As the *yajamāna* is the microcosmic counterpart of the Puruṣa Prajāpati, the entire ritual can be understood as a mechanism by which the mortal *yajamāna* constructs an immortal body in which he will ascend via the fire altar to the deathless realm of the heavens, from which he will return at the end of the ritual to enter back into the mortal world, reborn from his transcendent experience.[25]

Similarly, the Hindu temple is designed to act as an ascending mechanism for the temple patron as well as for the devotee, both of whom fulfill the role of the *yajamāna* in this context. Its purpose is thus parallel to that of the Vedic fire altar.[26] Kramrisch states, "The Hindu temple is built with the fervour of devotion (*bhakti*) as a work of offering and pious liberality, in order to secure for the builder a place in heaven, which means a high level of inward realization and to increase the religious merit, the *Prāsāda* [temple superstructure] functions similarly, for every devotee, who comes to and enters the temple. The temple is built as a work of supererogation, with the utmost effort in material means and the striving of the spirit so that the

[25] Holdrege 1996: 61.
[26] Kramrisch 1946: 71.

Prāsāda attains and leads to the Highest Point."[27] In fact the temple patron is instructed that he should construct a temple just as he once performed sacrifice, and although his ascent to the heavens in the sacrifice is temporary, with the construction of a temple his ascension will be permanent because the temple itself is permanent.[28] In addition, although the privilege of ascension in the Vedic fire altar is reserved for the *yajamāna* alone, in the temple that privilege is extended beyond the temple patron to each individual devotee who moves through the space or simply sees the temple structure. In other words, the devotee participates in the ritual and purpose of the temple in a parallel fashion to the *yajamāna*'s participation in the ritual and purpose of the Vedic fire altar. This correlation between the *yajamāna* and the temple patron/devotee will become clearer as we move through the analysis.

The *Vāstupuruṣamaṇḍala*

The *sthapati* (temple architect) is charged with the role of the priest, as his task is to reconstitute Prajāpati's body in the form of the temple, just as the Vedic priests do in constructing the fire altar in the *agnicayana* sacrifice.[29] His first step in doing so is to install the *vāstupuruṣamaṇḍala* on the area upon which the temple will be built. This is a *maṇḍala* consisting of the body of Puruṣa in the shape of a square that is divided into sixty-four smaller squares. Each of these squares is occupied by a *devatā*, or god, with the largest, central square reserved for the creator Brahmā. This Puruṣa is said to

[27] Kramrisch 1946: 142.

[28] Kramrisch 1946: 139-40.

[29] Kramrisch 1946: 70; On the reconstitution of Prajāpati's body in the Vedic fire sacrifice, see Malamoud 1996: 59-60.

act as the stabilizing power beneath the temple while at the same time penetrating and becoming embodied in the temple structure itself. The measurements of its squares and orthogonals running diagonally through it dictate the placement and proportion of every part of the material temple constructed upon it.[30] Kramrisch claims that the origin of the *vāstupuruṣamaṇḍala* is the fire altar.[31] She states, "The symbolism of the Vedic altar, Agni, is continued in the Hindu temple, in its plan. The Vāstupuruṣa of this *maṇḍala* is indeed Agni-Prajāpati. It is drawn on the ground and not piled up."[32]

Yet there are some inconsistencies in the parallels. The *vāstupuruṣa* is said to be a fallen *asura* (demon) who shrouds existence. In an attempt to reconstitute order, he is pinned face down by the gods, who sit upon him, and thus the various gods are located within the squares that make up the *vāstupuruṣa* grid. In contrast, the Puruṣa Prajāpati of the Vedic fire altar is not an *asura* but is rather identified with the primordial Puruṣa from Ṛg-Veda 10.90. Moreover, this Puruṣa Prajāpati faces upward, not down. In its discussion about the positioning of the gold disk of the sun and the golden Puruṣa in the first layer of the fire altar, Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa 7.4.1.18 states, "He lays down on his back. . . . They laid down the one [the golden Puruṣa] so as to look hitherwards, and the other so as to look away from here: that one (the sun), the gold disk, looking downwards, gives warmth by his rays, and that man (tends) upward by his vital airs."

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[30] Kramrisch 1946: 19-97.

[31] Kramrisch 1946: 79.

[32] Kramrisch 1946: 71.

Kramrisch claims that these inconsistencies are reconciled through worship of the *vāstupuruṣa*. "To the devotee who worships the Vāstupuruṣa a miracle happens. He beholds him in his true state, facing upwards, whence he had fallen. The Vāstupuruṣa thus lies in the same position as Agni-Prajāpati reconstituted as the Vedic Altar."[33] Another solution is the interjection of a second Puruṣa. An example of this is given in the *Kāśyapajñānakāṇḍa*: "There are two 'men of the house,' an immovable and a moveable one. The immovable one is lying there in the ground, his head in an eastern direction, his limbs sunk into the soil, his face downwards [Vāstupuruṣa]. Above him constantly another one is lying, on his back [Agni-Prajāpati], during the three periods of the day and midnight, with his head towards the N, E, S, and W respectively."[34] In this manner, the Puruṣa of the *maṇḍala* and the Puruṣa of the fire altar are rendered consubstantial.

The temple proper, which is constructed atop this underpinning *vāstupuruṣamaṇḍala*, consists of three primary parts; the *adhiṣṭhāna* (plinth), the *garbhagṛha* (womb-chamber), and the *prāsāda* (superstructure). Just as the term for the Vedic fire altar sacrifice, *agnicayana*, refers to the piling up of the brick altar, the term *prāsāda* also has an etymology that relates to the construction of the fire altar. *Prāsāda* is a Sanskrit word derived from *sādana*, which itself is a derivative of the root √*sad*, "to settle down, to place." Thus, *sādana* is a term that denotes the piling of

[33] Kramrisch 1946: 78.

[34] *Kāśyapajñānakāṇḍa* 1965: 95. Goudriaan links this upward *puruṣa* with the *puruṣa* turned upward by the meditation practice of the devotee, which Kramrisch speaks of. See *Kāśyapajñānakāṇḍa* 1965: 95, n.3.

the bricks of the Vedic fire altar.[35] Kramrisch argues that this meaning is reflected in the physical form of the *prāsāda*. She comments, "Its total structure moreover, when seen from outside has the appearance of a massive pile, and is a monument more than a building."[36] The term for an early Buddhist temple, *caitya*, has a similar etymology: it is derived from the Sanskrit term *citi*, meaning "layer" or "pile."[37]

The Vedic fire altar is considered the self of the *yajamāna*, and its measurements are based on the measurements of the *yajamāna*'s body. Kane states, "On the day of the last *dīkṣā* the measuring of the plot to be used as *vedi* takes place. Measurements are made with a rope which is twice the height of the sacrificer."[38] In the same way, the temple is recognized as the embodiment of the temple patron. In some instances, the temple itself is constructed in direct proportion to the body of the patron responsible for its construction.[39] Moreover, this correlation between the patron and the *vāstupuruṣa* can take the form of a mutual embodiment in which the consciousness of the patron and that of the *vāstupuruṣa* interpenetrate one another's body. "A relation exists between the body of the builder and that of the 'man of the house' [temple]: '*kaṇḍūyate yad aṅgaṃ gṛhabhartur. . . saśalyaṃ tat*,' if the owner of the house scratches a limb, that same limb (of the man of the house) contains a

[35] Monier-Williams 1995: 1138.2; Kramrisch 1946: 148.

[36] Kramrisch 1946: 147.

[37] Monier-Williams 1995: 394.2; Kramrisch 1946: 147.

[38] Kane 1974: 1250.

[39] Mānasāra 52.11-15, 59-64; Acharya 1979: 441.

thorn."[40] Similarly, Kramrisch comments, "The Yajamāna, the builder or patron (kāraka), in his ultimate aim is brought into communion with the Vāstupuruṣa. The Kāraka has been made aware that he is one with the Vāstu, by different magical signs and warnings felt in his body, prior to the drawing of the Vāstupuruṣamaṇḍala."[41]

This identification is directly tied to the success or failure of the temple construction. All benefits of the construction of a temple go to the patron responsible for the building of that temple, just as all merit from a Vedic sacrifice goes to the *yajamāna* of that sacrifice. [42]

> One who builds the temple of Viṣṇu gets that great benefit which (one would acquire) by doing sacrificial rites everyday. By building a temple for Viṣṇu (one) conveys hundreds of his descendants and hundreds of his ancestors to the world of Acyuta. Viṣṇu is identical with the seven worlds. One who builds a house for him saves the endless worlds and also obtains endlessness. One who builds (a temple) for him, lives for so many years in heaven as the number of years the set of bricks would remain. The maker of the idol (would reach) the world of Viṣṇu. One who consecrates it would get absorbed in Hari.[43]

Furthermore, if the temple construction does not strictly follow the correct procedures, it spells disaster for the patron in the same way that deviation from the precise recitation of the *mantra*s in the Vedic sacrifice causes destruction of the *yajamāna*.[44] In a chapter on mistakes in construction, the *Kāśyapajñānakāṇḍa* states,

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[40] *Kāśyapajñānakāṇḍa* 1965: 96, n.7.

[41] Kramrisch 1946: 74.

[42] Kramrisch 1946: 142; B. Smith 1998: 101.

[43] Agṇi Purāṇa 38.39-49. See also *Kāśyapajñānakāṇḍa* 1965: 77. For a similar quote regarding Śiva, see Kramrich's comments on the *Śaivāgamanibandhana* in Kramrisch 1946: 142, n. 40.

[44] Holdrege 1996: 347-48.

"Further, if the moveable image's likeness to the immovable one is disturbed, if its measures are too small, or if it has been made for another temple, this will cause the destruction of the king and the kingdom."[45] Thus, on a subtle level the patron is intimately woven into the body of the temple.

Ground Preparation and the Central Column

The actual construction of the temple is begun by first plowing and seeding the ground that the temple will occupy, just as the ground where the fire altar is to be constructed is plowed and seeded.[46] In this way, the ground is made fertile and prepared for the birthing of the temple. Immediately following the plowing and seeding is the installation of the creator Brahmā in the center, or *brahmasthāna*, of the *maṇḍala*. This is done by digging a hole in the center of the site and throwing a lotus flower into it. This represents the myth of Brahmā's birth from a lotus flower afloat on the primordial waters and signifies the creation of the universe. This lotus also recalls the lotus leaf laid atop the first brick in the foundation of the *agnicayana* fire altar.[47]

Along with the lotus leaf, there are several other objects that are vertically embedded within the fire altar's foundation. These objects find their correlates in a similar vertical alignment in the foundation of the temple. In the fire altar the first brick is placed under what will become the center of the altar. On top of it is laid the

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[45] *Kāśyapajñānakāṇḍa* 1965: 292.

[46] Kramrisch 1946: 126, n86; Tull 1989: 86.

[47] For a discussion of the 'Lotus of Brahma' as well as a thorough description of the plowing and seeding ceremony, see chapter 22 of *Kāśyapajñānakāṇḍa* 1965: 81-88.

previously mentioned lotus leaf, followed by the golden disk facing down, then the golden man facing up, and finally the first of three perforated bricks (*svayamātṛṇṇā*). While the lotus leaf is associated with the primordial waters, the golden disk and golden man can be equated with the golden egg (*hiraṇyagarbha*) afloat on the primordial waters of creation. This lotus leaf is also identified with the womb. Thus, the golden man can be seen as buried deep in the womb of the altar.[48] As mentioned earlier, this golden man represents the primordial man, Puruṣa, described in Ṛg-Veda 10.90, who is identified with the creator Prajāpati in the Brāhmaṇas. He also represents the *yajamāna*, who is the microcosmic counterpart of the Puruṣa Prajāpati. Near to this vertical column of objects and facing the golden Puruṣa a tortoise is buried. This tortoise is identified with *triloka*, the three worlds, as his lower shell represents the earth; his body, the midregions; and his upper shell, the heavens.[49]

As mentioned earlier, the first of three perforated bricks rests on top of the golden man. This brick is situated at the center of the first layer of the fire altar. The other two perforated bricks are placed at the center of the third and fifth layers, respectively, thus extending the vertical axis begun in the foundation. These perforated bricks also represent the earth, midregions, and heavens, and by being perforated air is able to pass through them. In this way, they provide the breath (*prāṇa*) and passageway for the golden man, *yajamāna*, to ascend to the heavens.[50] The position of the golden man directly relates to the breath of this passageway. With

[48] Tull 1989: 91.

[49] Kane 1974: 1251; Staal 1983: 67; Tull 1989: 92.

[50] Tull 1989: 92; Staal 1983: 65.

respect to the upward facing direction of the golden Puruṣa, Eggeling notes that with the upward breath streams forth the immortal part of a man's vital airs.[51] It is this immortal vital air that carries the *yajamāna* upward through the space created by the *svayamātṛṇṇās*. Mythically this space is created when the gods draw back after reconstituting Prajāpati. It is in this space that Prajāpati establishes himself, suggesting that he enters into this space.[52] He fills it himself, in the same manner that the *yajamāna* will fill this space as he ascends along its axis up to the heavens.[53] Malamoud states, "These openings, these pockets of empty space in the midst of such fullness, are there in order that the golden man, the replica of the sacrificer and the anthropomorphic image of Prajāpati, might breathe and elevate himself, by degrees, up to and beyond the world of heaven."[54]

In the vertical sequence in the foundation of the temple, the tortoise is incorporated into the central axis and multiplied threefold along with the lotus. The golden Puruṣa and his disk have been replaced by the *nidhikalaśa* (treasure jar), a stone vessel containing gold or other precious materials. The sequence is as follows: the *ādhāraśilā* (foundation stone), the *nidhikalaśa*, a stone lotus, a stone tortoise, a silver lotus, a silver tortoise, a gold lotus, and a gold tortoise, followed by a hollow copper tube running from the golden tortoise up through the center of the temple floor

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[51] Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa 1972: 368, n.1. This comment is in reference to Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa 6.7.1.11.

[52] Malamoud 1996: 64-65.

[53] Tull 1989: 92; Staal 1983: 65.

[54] Malamoud 1996: 64.

where the presiding deity is installed. The three worlds represented by the single tortoise in the fire altar are correlated in the temple with the stone, silver, and gold tortoises, each representing one world—earth, midregions, and heavens, respectively. This vertical alignment is anchored through the *ādhāraśilā* to Brahmā in the center of the *brahmasthāna*, the navel of the *vāstupuruṣamaṇḍala*.[55]

As in the Vedic fire altar, this vertical column continues up through the entire temple structure—through the *adhiṣṭhāna*, through the *garbhagṛha*, through the *prāsāda*, and beyond. In fact the entire temple is constructed around it and given definition by it. This column is rooted in the Vedic fire altar. Kramrisch states, "The pillar within the temple corresponds to the vertical channel marked by the Svayamātṛṇṇā stones of the Fire Altar."[56] And she continues her description of the column's appearance in the temple:

> The World Pillar inheres in the World Mountain and transcends it where it becomes visible above the highest stratum of the superstructure. The mountain shape of the Prāsāda is the sheath of its vertical axis. The vertical axis is clothed in it, from the floor of the Garbhagṛha to the shoulder course of the superstructure; from there however it is seen to exceed the body of the superstructure. . . . Encased in the vertical shape of the pillar, which is circular, as a rule, or polygonal . . . , it transcends the slopes of the superstructure although for a short distance only. It is therefore called Grīvā or Neck. It emerges from the body of the Prāsāda to be capped by a dome . . . or clasped by an Āmalaka . . . . These crowning shapes of the pillar support the finial of the temple. Its Highest Point, the end or beginning of the axis of the temple, is in the center of the hollow shaft above the Liṅga or image in the Garbhagṛha, above the Womb and Center of the Cosmos and above the Navel of the Earth.

[55] Kramrisch 1946: 110-112.

[56] Kramrisch 1946: 175.

> The finial is beyond the body of the temple, which has its extension in Antarikṣa, the mid-space. Above its High Temple (harmya) and cupola (śikhara); . . . above its being gathered by the Āmalaka . . . rises the finial, the Stūpikā, in the Empyrean and up to the Bindu, its Highest Point, the limit between the unmanifest and the manifest.[57]

Just as the altar breathes through the column formed by the pierced bricks,[58] the temple breathes through its corresponding hollow column. The *garbhagṛha* breathes through this column, and the devotee enwombed in the *garbhagṛha* breathes through this column, and, like the golden man at the base of the fire altar, he ascends by means of the immortal breath in this column.

The central column of the fire altar by which the *yajamāna* ascends by degrees to immortality has also been appropriated by various yogic traditions whose roots are found in the Upaniṣadic revolution, which sought to internalize the Vedic sacrifice within the human body. As is expressed in various yogic texts, the *yogin*, through meditation, ascends along the *suṣumṇa* (central column) of his subtle body through the successive power centers, or *cakras*, until he merges with the absolute in the highest *cakra*, the *sahasrāra*, which is located just above the crown of the head.[59] The correspondences between the temple structure and the yogic body are eventually picked up by temple designers, and by at least the fifteenth century CE we have

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[57] Kramrisch 1946: 175-76.

[58] Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa 7.4.2.2.

[59] An extensive description of this yogic process can be found in the *Ṣaṭ-Cakra-Nirūpaṇa,* which is purported to form part of the sixth chapter of the *Śrī-Tattva-Cintāmaṇī* attributed to the sixteenth-century adept, Pūrṇānanda. For a full translation with commentary of this work, see Woodroffe 1918. For a detailed discussion of the earliest textual accounts of the six *cakra*s and *haṭha-yoga* practice, see White 1996: 73; 134-35; 422-23, ns. 83-92.

evidence of the temple column being directly correlated with the yogic body of the temple patron/devotee, as noted by L. A. Ravi Varma in his comments on the Keralan text the *Tantrasamuccaya*:

> This is known as *ṣaḍādhāra-pratiṣṭhā* or the fixing up of the six *ādhāras* or supports. . . . The lowest is a square block of granite or other hard stone of definite dimensions. This is known as *ādhāraśilā* or "support stone." This represents the *mūlādhāra*, the lowest of the six *cakras* (plexuses) in the body. Over this comes a pot-like device in stone or copper, known as *nidhikumbha* (pot of deposit). This stands for the second or *svādhiṣṭhānacakra*. Above this comes a *padma* (lotus bud) made of stone; this represents the *maṇipūra*. Next comes a tortoise made in stone and known as *kūrma*, which stands for *anāhatacakra*. Above this comes an open lotus flower in silver with a tortoise of the same metal in it; this represents the *viśuddhacakra*. Over this comes a similar set of lotus and tortoise done in gold; this stands for the sixth or *ājñācakra*. Above this comes a hollow copper tube known as *yoganālī*. This represents the *suṣumṇā* or spinal cord. The very names are sufficient to show the underlying yogic sense. This arrangement depicts the *kṣetra* (temple) itself as the *kṣetra* (body) of the *yogin*. The actual idol will be placed where the *sahasrārapadma* would be. Thus a perfect and complete yogic representation is given to the *pratiṣṭha-vigraha*.[60]

This yogic structure mirrored in the temple foundation suggests that the true purpose of the temple is the ascension of the temple patron as well as the devotee (see Figure 1).

This identification of sacred space with the internal meditation practice of the *yogin* is not surprising given its roots in the Vedic fire altar. Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa 10.6.3.1-2 speaks of the "golden Puruṣa in the heart" and equates it with the absolute, Brahman/Ātman, that is experienced through meditation. Staal also discusses the internalization of the fire altar in the Upaniṣads: "The yajamāna's identity with

[60] Varma 1956: 452-53.

Prajāpati and with the fire altar, the center of which is called its 'body' or 'self,' was generalized into the identity of Ātman and Brahman in every human being, which is one of the cornerstones of Indian philosophy."[61]

The Bricks

The building material of the Vedic fire altar is the *iṣṭakā* (brick). The substance of the *iṣṭakā* is not only *bhūmi* (earth) but also Agni as well as the offspring of the *yajamāna*.[62] In this way, the brick is the very embodiment of the sacrifice itself. This sacred quality of the brick is carried over into the temple. The term for the basic building material of the temple, be it stone, brick, or wood, is *iṣṭakā*. This is because the construction of the temple is directly identified with the piling of the fire altar bricks; it *is* the fire altar. In temple construction, stone or wood are simply substitutes for the brick of the altar.[63] In addition, these bricks are identified with the temple patron and help him construct his ritual body, just as the bricks in the fire altar help the *yajamāna* construct his sacrificial body. Kramrisch refers to the fire altar bricks, and thus the fire altar itself, as the place of transubstantiation for Prajāpati and his microcosmic counterpart, the *yajamāna*.[64] She comments that it is the same with the temple and that the process of transubstantiation is the very purpose of the temple. The temple patron and the devotee are meant to ascend and transcend through the

[61] Staal 1983: 68.

[62] Malamoud 1996: 61-62; Tull 1989: 87.

[63] Kramrisch 1946: 108.

[64] Kramrisch 1946: 102-03.

temple in the same manner that the *yajamāna* ascends and transcends through the fire altar.[65]

The Seed of the Altar and the Seed of the Temple

Before the temple can become a fully constructed embodiment of the Puruṣa/patron/devotee, the seed from which it will spring must be placed within its lower walls, just inside the entrance door. This seed takes the form of a casket and is called *garbhapātra*. Its measurements are proportionate to those of the temple and in some instances to those of the patron himself. The casket is divided into compartments corresponding to the grid of the *vāstupuruṣamaṇḍala*, and the divinities of the *maṇḍala* take up residence within these compartments. In the casket is distributed an array of precious stones, metals, and earthly objects such as grains and medicinal plants. Within the *brahmasthāna* of the casket are placed the attributes of the deity who will be installed in the inner sanctum of the temple.[66] In the past the specific placement of this *garbhapātra* was directly related to the social status of the patron and his presumed degree of mental development. Kramrisch explains, "The vessel which holds the Seed and Germ of the Prāsāda is to be deposited on the ground, on the lowermost moulding (upāna) or on the topmost moulding (prati) of the base, according to the status of the patron, whether he be a Brāhmaṇa, Kṣatriya, or belongs to the lower caste. With the status of the donor thus embedded in the temple,

[65] Kramrisch 1946: 104.

[66] Kramrisch 1946: 126-28.

the intellectual level is indicated from which he begins his ascent."[67] Thus, the seed of the temple can be recognized as the very self of the patron. The *garbhapātra* has its Vedic counterpart in the *ukhā*, fire-pan, of the fire altar.[68]

> As the vehicle of the fire the fire pan is identified as the "self" (*ātman*) of the fire altar. And, as such, the fire pan is said to give birth to the altar. The integral relationship of these two is expressed concretely in the burying of the pan within the bottom layer of the altar. Of equal importance to this relationship is the relationship between the sacrificer and the fire pan, for the fire pan is also identified with the sacrificer; after it is fashioned and before the altar is built, the sacrificer straps the fire pan to himself for a period of one year.[69]

With the self of the patron embedded in it, the *garbhapātra* becomes the seed of the temple. It will give birth to the temple in the same way the *ukhā* gives birth to the fire altar.

The Superstructure of the Temple

With the placement of the *garbhapātra*, we have moved from the foundation to the *adhiṣṭhāna*, the lowest part of the temple proper, which sits at the level where the *yoganālī* (hollow copper tube topping the vertical foundation column) terminates. The *adhiṣṭhāna*, or "stand" of the temple, consists of the plinth and lower wall of the temple, surrounding and cradling the *garbhagṛha* (womb-chamber) within (see Figures 2 and 3). This surrounding wall, called a *vedikā*, can be correlated with the Vedic sacrificial enclosure known as the *vedi*, from which it also derives its name.[70] Kramrisch notes, "In these lower parts of the temple, the pedestal, Adhiṣṭhāna, the

[67] Kramrisch 1946: 106-07.

[68] Kramrisch 1946: 126.

[69] Tull 1989: 86.

[70] Coomaraswamy 1971: 22.

socle, and the Vedikā is embodied the memory of the sacred ground (vedi) with its piled altar (citi) whence the sacrificial offerings were carried up by the flaming fire."[71] In this way, the *adhiṣṭhāna* is said to be the sacrificial ground upon which the offering of the temple is constructed.[72]

At this level of the temple is inscribed another reference to the fire altar. At the beginning of the *agnicayana* a sacrifice is performed. The victims are supposed to be a man, a bull, a horse, a ram, and a goat. The heads of these sacrificial victims of the Vedic fire altar, or ritual substitutes in the form of clay or gold representations of their heads—which are also referred to as *iṣṭakā*, brick,—are then embedded into the bottom layer of the fire altar.[73] This rite has been carried over into the temple structure where images of the sacrificial victims are found carved in horizontal bands running along the outside of the *vedikā*.[74]

Resting within the walls of this *vedikā* lies the *garbhagṛha* of the temple. The Vedic precursor of the *garbhagṛha* can be found in the structure of a hut that is constructed on the sacrificial field for the purpose of consecration rites. This hut is the place of generation in which the *dīkṣā*, initiation of the *yajamāna*, occurs, and he becomes an embryo in the womb of the hut. "Within the hut which faces the East, the sacrificer, the embryo within the womb, also faces the East where the gods live;

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[71] Kramrisch 1946: 146.

[72] Kramrisch 1946: 145-47, n.45.

[73] Kane 1974: 1247, 1252; Malamoud 1996: 61; Tull 1989: 83-86.

[74] Kramrisch 1946: 146.

facing them he beholds them, he is one with them."[75] In the same manner, when a devotee passes through the doors of the temple and enters the *garbhagṛha*, which also faces east, he is said to be entering a womb from which he will be reborn. Kramrisch states, "The Garbhagṛha is not only the house of the Germ or embryo of the Temple as Puruṣa; it refers to man who comes to the Center and attains his new birth in its darkness."[76] Furthermore, a common motif rendered in relief on the door jam of the entrance to the *garbhagṛha* is that of the river goddess. River goddesses on door jams are emblematic of sacred rivers. Purified by the rivers as he passes through the doors, the devotee receives *dīkṣā* and enters the womb—he himself becomes enwombed.[77]

Upward from the darkness of this walled womb springs the *prāsāda* (superstructure). This *prāsāda* along with the *vedikā* is understood as a manifestation of the *garbhagṛha*. Kramrisch states, "The complete Prāsāda has the form of an unbroken ascent from the base to the finial. Within it and below the superstructure is the Garbhagṛha, the 'womb of the house' a small chamber, square, in the majority of preserved temples, and dark as a cave in a mountain. It is the innermost sanctuary of the Vimāna, and the entire temple."[78] This dark, cave-like chamber is reminiscent of the cave sanctuary, the womb of the earth, within the sacred mountain and at the same time is identified with the cavity of the heart in which the Puruṣa resides, the very center of every person. This cavity of the heart is said to consist of *ākāśa* (space).

[75] Kramrisch 1946: 157.
[76] Kramrisch 1946: 163.
[77] Kramrisch 1946: 314-15.
[78] Kramrisch 1946: 162.

Similarly, the space of the womb-chamber is said to consist of *ākāśa*. *Ākāśa* is the subtlest of the five elements (*mahābhūta*s) that are evolutes of *prakṛti*, primordial matter, from which everything is formed, and the quality associated with *ākāśa* is sound. Moreover, the forms and phenomena of creation are held to be manifestations of sound. The *garbhagṛha*'s association with *ākāśa* intimately ties it to the primordial sounds at the basis of creation. We will return to this important association between sound and structure towards the end of our exploration.

This kind of space, *ākāśa*, is not empty but in fact contains the fullness of unmanifest potential.[79] Malamoud states, "The void cannot merely be reduced to an absence: it is, first and foremost, a lump or swelling—and an adjective related to *śūnya* 'empty' is *śūna*, 'swollen,' with both derived from the same root as the verb *śvayati*, 'to swell up.' The void, as may be seen, is a disjunctive of fullness, an insertion into plentitude."[80] In this regard, the space of the *garbhagṛha* can be understood as an active space, swelling with potential. This swollen force exerts pressure outward and defines itself in the surrounding structure of the temple. As Kramrisch explains, "The impact of the outward movement is caused from the small internal cavity, the innermost sanctuary. . . . With the inclusion of the small space in the innermost core of the mass, a pressure as it were is exerted on it from within; it

[79] Kramrisch 1946: 164.

[80] Malamoud 1996: 72.

impresses itself on the bricks."[81] Thus, the space of the *garbhagṛha* is the source from which the temple manifests, and this source is *ākāśa*.

> Akāśa, ether, corresponds to the primordial substance Prakṛti, in the process of manifestation. It is the first departure into manifestation from the unchanging Pure Principle or Essence, into ever more concrete substance. This departure or transformation, while taking form and shape takes place literally, across the walls which bound it. From . . . the center of the Garbhagṛha, the walls around it while sheltering it, are held together by the Essence and formed by it in every buttress, profile and figure. On the outside, the mass of the temple is seen to give full exposition, in the light of day to the meaning enshrined in darkness within.[82]

In this manner, the entire temple is understood to be defined by this central space as well as being an expression of it. The temple is this living essence, just as the underlying square of the temple is the living Puruṣa. Kramrisch asserts, "The form of the Prāsāda (Prāsāda-mūrti) is the monumental embodiment of Puruṣa, the Essence, it is the form of Consciousness itself."[83]

The Finial of the Temple

The ascending structure of the temple terminates in the golden finial, *kalaśa* (vessel), lying above and beyond the actual body of the temple (see Figures 2 and 3). Between the top of the *prāsāda* and the *kalaśa*, the central column makes its only visible appearance, like the yogic *suṣumṇā* extending above the top of the head of the *yogin* to the *sahasrāra* situated above it that marks the gap between the manifest realm and the unmanifest. This point of transition in the temple is marked by the *āmalaka*, a

[81] Kramrisch 1946: 103.

[82] Kramrisch 1946: 164.

[83] Kramrisch 1946: 360.

ribbed ring on the *śikhara* of the northern style temples (Nāgara) and a domed cap on the *vimāna* of the southern style temples (Drāviḍian) (see Figures 2 and 3). The *āmalaka* corresponds to the third and topmost perforated brick (*svayamātṛṇṇā*) of the fire altar, marking the heavens and providing passage for the patron/devotee to the highest region, the realm of deathlessness, beyond the temple.[84] This point of the *āmalaka* also corresponds to the fifth layer of the fire altar. Tull states, "The relationship of the 'head' [fifth layer] and 'body' [lower four layers] of the fire altar is exemplified in the notion that the fourth level is not only the *brahman* but also death (*mṛtyu*). In passing above the fourth layer, the sacrificer exceeds material existence, with its inevitable decay, and enters the realm of immortality."[85] Thus, the golden *kalaśa* resting upon the *āmalaka* can be correlated with the flame of Agni installed atop the golden-flake-strewn fifth layer of the fire altar.[86] The entire structure operates as a mechanism of ascension. If the process of ascension begins within the temple from the darkness of the center of the womb-chamber, then the ascension is instantaneous. If the process of ascension occurs outside the temple, then the pilgrim moves, by means of his or her vision, in stages up the exterior of the *prāsāda*, which acts as the *mūrti* in this case.[87]

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[84] Kramrisch 1946: 350.

[85] Tull 1989: 94. For a discussion of this same correlation between *brahman* and death as found in the Brāhmaṇas, see White 2009, Chapter 2.

[86] Malamoud 1996: 60.

[87] Kramrisch 1946: 351.

As the counterpart to the *nidhikalaśa* at the base of the temple column that contains the treasures of the earth, the golden *kalaśa* is made from the different parts of all the gods and merges the properties of all that is manifested with the immortal. Into this deathless womb a fundamental component of the Vedic fire altar is placed: the golden Puruṣa.[88] Rather than appearing buried deep inside the temple foundation at the base of the hollow column, as he is found in the fire altar, he is instead installed inside the golden *kalaśa* already fully ascended on his immortal breath to the realm of deathlessness at the top of the hollow column, where he lies facing upward in the same position as the golden Puruṣa of the fire altar.[89]

> When the building is completed and consecrated, its effigy in the shape of a golden man, the Prāsāda-Puruṣa, is installed in the golden jar, above the Garbhagṛha, above the Śukanāsā. The effigy is invested with all the Forms and Principles of manifestation. While the Vāstupuruṣa "Existence" lies at the base of the temple and is its support the Golden Puruṣa of the Prāsāda, its indwelling Essence, sum total of all the Forms and Principles (tattva) of manifestation and their reintegration lies in the superluminous darkness of the Golden jar on top of the temple below the point limit of the manifest. In the supernal radiance, the Golden Puruṣa of the Vedic Altar appears raised from the golden disc—of the sun—within the bottom layer of the Agni to the finial above the superstructure of the Hindu temple.[90]

The golden Puruṣa facing upward at the top of the temple column is thus the counterpart of the downward-facing *vāstupuruṣa* of the underlying *maṇḍala* at the

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[88] Kramrisch 1946: 349-50.

[89] This *āmalaka-kalaśa* configuration is mirrored in eleventh-century Trika Kaula concepts of the yogic body, where the *kuṇḍalinī* of the initiate is said to ascend along the central column of the body—which the initiate visualizes in the form of Śiva's trident—pierces the "knot of banner" (corresponding to the *āmalaka*) and rises to the plinth where the initiate installs the corpse of Sadāśiva facing upward toward the absolute (in the manner of the golden Puruṣa). See Sanderson 1986 : 178-80, 187.

[90] Kramrisch 1946: 360.

base of the column. This configuration directly reflects the double "men of the house" solution employed by the *Kāśyapajñānakāṇḍa*, discussed earlier, which reconciles the seemingly two different Puruṣas. In this regard, Kramrisch comments, "The ascension of the Golden Puruṣa cancels the descent of the Vāstupuruṣa."[91]

This upward-facing Puruṣa in the *kalaśa* atop the *āmalaka* evokes another aspect of the golden Puruṣa in the fire altar: his relationship to the golden sun disk. The ribs of the *āmalaka* are said to be the rays of the sun. As the *āmalaka* sits just below the golden man, it functions as the golden disk does in the fire altar and shines its rays upon the earth while the golden man faces upward. Indeed, it is said that a pillar of light extends down from the sun to the earth and radiates out as the structure of the temple.[92]

This downward motion of the light is significant. Although the construction of the temple is closely associated with the piling of the bricks of the fire altar, it is said to actually manifest in a downward direction. Kramrisch states, "The Highest Point of the temple is taken as its 'origin' and starting point, which it is ontologically; the temple as symbol of manifestation begins from the Bindu, the point limit between the unmanifest and the manifest. This point is situated above the Āmalaka."[93] Thus, the emergence of the temple into the manifest world involves a continual radiance downward along the swollen axis of its central column to the g*arbhagṛha* and

[91] Kramrisch 1946: 360.
[92] Kramrisch 1946: 351.
[93] Kramrisch 1946: 353.

outward to the manifold representations along the temple exterior and beyond (see Figure 4). Adam Hardy puts it this way:

> As the forms evolve downward, the summit recedes and the whole monument grows. Two kinds of movement underlie the process: emergence and expansion. As the temple architecture portrays, these are indivisible stages in a single pattern of emanation and growth, which continues without pause into decay, as forms fall apart and re-merge into undifferentiation. Like its origin, the destination of this movement, of this passage through time expressed in architectural form, is beyond the visible limits of the movement, but it is sensed in the dissolution of the parts, which begins in their very act of emergence.[94]

On at least one occasion the builders of a temple attempted to follow the same subtle pattern of "emergence and expansion" during the actual physical construction of the temple. The great Kailāsanātha temple at Ellora was excavated out of solid rock from the top down—that is, from the one singular point of the finial downward and outward to the base of the *adhiṣṭhāna*—with each descending level being completed and polished before moving on to the next lower section.[95] In this way, the builders, or excavators, succeeded in physically manifesting the temple in the manner in which it is said to emerge metaphysically.

This image of the sun as the pivot between the manifest and the unmanifest is expressed in the *yajamāna*'s daily ascent by means of the Vedic sacrifice, which is likened to a chariot and is reflected in Vedic notions of the warrior's ascent at death. As David White has shown, the dying warrior mounts an assault on the sun with the express intention of piercing it in order to enter the world of the gods by means of a

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[94] Hardy 1995: 19.

[95] Grover 1980: 121-22.

celestial chariot (*vimāna*), which has descended to aid him and whose reins are likened to the rays of the sun.[96] As these downward extending rays emanate from the *āmalaka* to manifest the temple structure, they in turn act as reins for the ascension of the worshiper who mounts his ascent via the central column of the temple superstructure (also called *vimāna*) to pierce the sun (*āmalaka*) and enter into the unmanifest realm beyond the mortal world.

The Vedic Sacrificial Field and the Temple Compound

Thus far we have dealt only with the main structure of the temple and its relation to the Vedic fire altar. I would like to expand this exploration and take a look at a few interesting elements within the broader temple compound and their relation to the larger Vedic sacrificial field that surrounds the fire altar. In L. A. Ravi Varma's comparison of the *yāgaśālā* and the Hindu temple, the main vertical structure of the temple is situated where the *gārhapatya*, domestic fire, is located on the western end of the sacrificial field (see Figure 5). In one regard this makes sense. The *gārhapatya* is associated with the female earth and acts as a tether for the heavenly bound *yajamāna*.[97] The form of the temple itself is said to be an extension of the earth, and, like the *gārhapatya*, the *garbhagṛha* is the place from where, having been reborn, the devotee reenters the world when the ritual is over.[98] Another manner in which the temple is associated with the *gārhapatya* is through the *vāstupuruṣamaṇḍala*. There

[96] White 2009, Chapter 2.

[97] Jamison 1996: 40-41; Tull 1989: 90.

[98] Jamison 1996: 41.

are thirty-two gods assigned to the outer squares of the *vāstupuruṣamaṇḍala*.[99] These squares form the earthly perimeter of the vertical temple structure, and they also correspond to the thirty-two stones surrounding the *gārhapatya* hearth.[100] Thus, the base of the temple is correlated with the domestic fire of the Vedic sacrificial field.

Yet as we have repeatedly seen, the temple proper is consistently likened to the fire altar itself, which is the *āhavanīya*, offering fire, that is located on the eastern end of the sacrificial field. If the temple is the fire altar, why, in relation to the Vedic sacrificial field, does it occupy the position of the domestic fire? Perhaps what we are looking at when the temple compound is mapped over the Vedic sacrificial field is a vertical alignment of these Vedic components within the temple proper. In other words, in the case of the temple, the offering fire sits on top of the domestic fire.

The *agnicayana* has been shown to be concerned primarily with ascension. Yet the sacrificial fires had to be distributed horizontally for an obvious reason: if one fire is placed on top of the other, the two fires will lose their distinction and become one fire. Even so, we see evidence of just such vertical alignment in the horizontal progression of the *agnicayana*. As the ceremony advances, the sacrificial field is expanded eastward and the fires are shifted along this axis. The *āhavanīya*, offering fire, moves to the easternmost end of this extended field, while the *gārhapatya* moves to the position of the old *āhavanīya* (see Figure 6).[101] The construction of the new *gārhapatya* on top of the old *āhavanīya* is akin to a birth. Tull states, "Here the womb

[99] Kramrisch 1946: 29.

[100] Kramrisch 1946: 151-52, n.60.

[101] Staal 1983: 48-49.

is said to be the earth, and the embryo inside the womb is identified as having both the shape of a man and the shape of a bird, which is the shape of the completed fire altar. The Gārhapatya thus represents the earthly foundation of man and the fire altar, both of which will be (ritually) born during the course of the Agnicayana's performance."[102] It is in this process of ritual birth that the temple's spatial correlation with the fire altar is revealed.

As has been discussed, the position of the temple is firmly tied to the position of the *gārhapatya*, which is itself connected to the fire altar through the primary function of the *ukhā*, fire pan. Tull explains, "Although the fire pan is used in several ways in the Agnicayana, its principal function is to transfer the consecrated fire (*agni*) from the old ritual fireplace, which is used for lesser rites, to the newly built fire altar."[103] As has been shown, the counterpart of the *ukhā* in the temple is the *garbhapātra*, for it is the seed of the temple as the *ukhā* is the seed of the fire altar. The *ukhā* carries within its womb the fire embryo and deposits it at the base of the fire altar to which it gives birth—a new *āhavanīya* that is horizontally differentiated from the *gārhapatya* from which it comes. Correspondingly, the *garbhapātra* carries within it the Puruṣa embryo (modeled on its underlying *vāstupuruṣa*) and deposits it in the base of the temple to which it gives birth—a temple that is vertically differentiated from the *vāstupuruṣamaṇḍala* from which it comes.

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[102] Tull 1989: 89.

[103] Tull 1989: 86.

In addition, although the rebirth of the *yajamāna* in the *agnicayana* is said to occur by his ascension up through the five-layer fire altar, what we see in the visible movement of the ceremony is a horizontal progression from west to east across the sacrificial field. Through the lateral movement of the *ukhā* from the old *āhavanīya* pit to the new *āhavanīya* on the fire altar, the original sacrificial field that is viewed as the world of mortals gives birth to the new sacrificial field that is viewed as the world of the gods. All of this seems to be a process by which the *yajamāna*, in ritual stages, is elevated—although horizontally—into the realm of the gods and to immortality.[104] Similarly, on a vertical axis, the elevation of the temple moves from the mortal realm of human beings in the *garbhagṛha* to the immortal realm of the gods in the *kalaśa* lying beyond the manifest body of the temple. This vertical movement along the temple axis also evokes the Vedic fire altar through the names assigned to certain components (see Figures 2 and 3).

> The living memory of the Fire Altar . . . has not only remained at the bottom of the temple, where the Vāstupuruṣamaṇḍala represents its main residue, coterminous as it is actually or in principle with the Vedi, the total site, or with the extent of the Prāsāda. Reiterated in name, elevated in position and meaning, on a higher level of the temple, once more, the name Vedi is given to the upper portion of its superstructure, the Śikhara, on which is placed its crowning part the Āmalaka and then the finial. This Vedi may be called the Uttara Vedi of the temple.[105]

Thus, the horizontal disbursement of the sacrificial field is distributed vertically in the temple—a vertical orientation that was already inherent in the sacrificial field of the

[104] Staal 1983: 67.

[105] Kramrisch 1946: 146-47.

agnicayana with the presence of the overlapping fires as well as the ascending structure of the fire altar itself.

Sound and Form

We now move into a consideration of the final element from the Vedic tradition that had a significant impact on the design of the Hindu temple. It is an element that we briefly touched on earlier during our discussion of the *garbhagṛha*. In addition to interweaving the Vedic *agnicayana* sacrifice into the design and layout of the Hindu temple, the temple builders also incorporated into the structure of the temple the highest expression of the Vedic tradition: the sound of *mantra*s. Although participation in a Vedic fire sacrifice is a multi-sensory experience, the Vedic tradition holds that it is first and foremost auditory. The *mantra*s recited are said to be the very pulsations of creation arising out of the unmanifest stillness. It is these primordial sound impulses that the ancient Vedic *ṛṣi*s (seers) are said to have internally cognized while deeply immersed in meditation on the subtle planes of existence. These primordial sounds streamed forth and were preserved by the *ṛṣi*s in the form of the Vedic *mantra*s. Thus, the Vedic tradition recognizes that it is the sound structure of these *mantra*s that is of the utmost importance.[106] So dominant is this understanding that the Vedic fire altar of the *agnicayana*, although made of bricks and piled up through the labor of the priests, is said to have been wholly constructed of sound. With regard to the *mantra*s that are continually recited during the construction of the fire altar, the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa asserts, "This fire altar is

[106] Holdrege 1996: 227, 346-47.

language, for it is piled up with language."[107] Kramrisch, noting what must be the most extreme example of this conception, quotes B. B. Dutt's comments regarding the *chandaściti*:

> In the case of the Chandaściti, the Agnicit, the builder of the Fire-altar, draws on the ground the Agni of prescribed shape. He then goes through the whole prescribed process of construction imagining all the while that he is placing every brick in its proper place with the rhythmic formula (mantra) that belongs to it. The mantras are recited but the bricks are not actually laid. The Chandaściti thus is the Citi or altar made up of Chandas, rhythms or mantras, instead of bricks.[108]

Although one's movement through an architectural space is also a multi-sensory experience, such an encounter with architecture is first and foremost visual. With regard to the Hindu temple, the power of the vision of architecture can also be related back to the initial pulsations of creation cognized by the ancient *ṛṣi*s, for the *ṛṣi*s describe their experiences not only in terms of hearing sound vibrations but also in terms of seeing them as sound-forms inscribed in light—hence the name *ṛṣi*, "seer."[109] This point was not lost on the original temple designers, who felt the need to reconcile the temple's visual dominance with the preeminence afforded sound with respect to the fire altar. In the *agnicayana* the ascension of the *yajamāna* is said to be made upon the sound of, among others, the *dūrohaṇa mantra*, and this same *mantra* is believed to be embodied in the very structure of the temple. In discussing the manner in which the eye, when observing the Hindu temple, is visually drawn upward to the point of the *āmalaka* by the stages of the ascending architectural features of the

[107] Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa 9.1.2.17.

[108] Kramrisch 1946: 140, n. 34.

[109] Holdrege 1996: 232-233.

temple's superstructure, Kramrisch explains, "It is a long ascent (Dūrohaṇaṃ) made by the eye on the basis of shape and form. This ascent is an architectural analogy to the recitation of the Dūrohaṇa mantra."[110] Thus, the temple is held to be the visual manifestation of the sound of the *mantra*s. In this way the temple structure is tied into the highest expression of the earlier Vedic tradition and reveals itself to be the unquestionable offspring of the Vedic fire altar.

Our discussion in the first section of this study has focused on the profound influence of the Vedic sacrificial field, in particular the *agnicayana* fire altar, on the meaning, design, and functions of the Hindu temple in relation to both the temple's patron and the devotee. Yet what has been curiously absent from this discussion is in fact the most critical component of the temple itself: the presiding deity who takes up residence in the center of the temple's *garbhagṛha*. The reason for this is simple. The deity's embodiment in the temple and the procedures for establishing this embodiment are not rooted in the earlier Vedic tradition but rather developed out of the ontologies associated with the deities who came to occupy these temples—ontologies that are primarily developed in post-Vedic Purāṇic traditions. It is to this important feature that we now turn.

[110] Kramrisch 1946: 349.

CHAPTER 2
Ideology of *Mūrti*s

While the temple can be recognized as an extension of the Vedic fire altar, it is radically set off from the Vedic sacrificial field by the incorporation of a central deity into its inner sanctum to whom the temple is then dedicated. This deity can potentially be any one of a number of Hindu gods or goddesses. Yet the design parameters for temples discussed in the Vāstu-Śāstras and Śilpa-Śāstras are not specific to any particular god. They are more like generic models in which a particular deity can be instantiated—a sort of "insert deity here" format. With regard to the Hindu architectural context, Dagens comments, "The general rules of architecture are common to all buildings, religious or secular."[111] Similarly, Alice Boner suggests that the temple design does not indicate which deity is to be installed.[112] What distinguishes a temple as specific to one deity is the construction of the *mūrti* of that deity to be housed in its *garbhagṛha* as well as the investing of the *mūrti* with the "life breath" (*prāṇa*) of the deity. Although the temples described in these architectural treatises are somewhat generic as models, in actuality the specific temple design employed in any given temple construction project is anything but

[111] Dagens 1984: 2-3, 1.2.

[112] Boner 1975: 59.

generic, as the temple's dimensions are intricately interwoven with the dimensions of designated *mūrti* instantiated in the center of its *garbhagṛha*. The Mayamatam, a Śaiva Vāstu-Śastra, states, "The dimensions of a temple (may be calculated) from those of the Liṅga or (those of) the Liṅga, from those of the temple."[113] This embedded correspondence between the *mūrti* and its temple is a critical component in infusing the space with divine power.

The material image of a deity housed within a temple is not considered a mere representation of the deity but is believed to be an actual embodiment of that deity.[114] How does this embodiment come about, and what is its relationship to the temple structure itself? In order to answer this question, we will focus on one of the sectarian traditions in the Hindu fold, the Śaiva tradition, and explore the manner in which its principal deity, Śiva, becomes established in a temple.[115] We will trace the construction and consecration of the *mūrti* and Śiva's eventual embodiment in it, as well as in the temple at large, through an examination of relevant sections of the

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[113] Mayamatam 33.37a.

[114] Unlike the English term *image*, which carries with it the notion of representation, the Sanskrit term *mūrti* carries within it the very notion of embodiment. It is derived from the verbal root √*murch*, meaning "to become solid, thicken, congeal; or to fill, pervade, penetrate." In this regard the term *mūrti* carries with it a sense of becoming concrete in form. For further analysis of the notion of embodiment conveyed in the term *mūrti*, see Busse 2007. For an analysis of the embodied understanding of *mūrti* in the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava tradition, see Holdrege 2014. For a general overview of the role of divine images in Hindu traditions, see Eck 1985: 16-22.

[115] As this process is more or less the same with subtle variations across the sectarian traditions, this consideration of the installation of Śiva in a temple will serve to inform us on the broader practice of *mūrti* installation.

Vāstu-Śāstras and Śilpa-Śāstras, and their accompanying Āgamic texts along with select Purāṇas.[116]

Syntax of Temple Construction and Consecration

The most obvious and important element qualifying the identity of any given temple is the deity housed within its inner sanctum. Yet before the installation of the deity in the *garbhagrha* can take place the foundation of the temple must be laid, and it is in these early steps of temple construction that the deity of the temple first makes his or her appearance. According to the Vāstu-Śāstras, in the foundation of every building a pit is dug and filled with water. In this pit is placed a lotus, some grain, and the casket, or *garbhapātra,* which has inscribed in it a *maṇḍala* corresponding to the *vāstupuruṣamaṇḍala* that is inscribed on the ground beneath the rising temple.[117] As discussed earlier, grain, metals, precious stones, and medicinal plants are placed in the various compartments of the *maṇḍala*. If the building is to be a temple, then included in this casket are objects related to the specific attributes of the deity to be housed in the temple.[118] According to the Mayamatam, the attributes of Śiva that are to be placed in it are "a skull, a trident, a *khaṭvāṅga*, an axe, a bull, a bow, a gazelle,

[116] In Vaiṣṇava traditions the Pāñcarātrā Saṃhitās play the same role as the Śaiva Āgamas. These will be referenced where appropriate in the coming analysis.

[117] According to the Mayamatam, the *maṇḍala* for the casket will either be the *pīṭha maṇḍala* or the *upāpīṭha maṇḍala*. See 12.13-15a and Mayamatam 1994: 123, n. 9. The casket's diagram may not be the same layout as the one on which the temple is constructed. See Mayamatam 12.15b-17.

[118] Mayamatam 12.1-32b; Mānasāra 12.1-114.

and a noose."[119] Once the casket is set in the pit, a board is placed over the pit and an image of the deity is carved on the board.[120] The Mānasāra describes it in this way: "The image should be in the erect or sitting posture, be adorned with clotted hair and diadem, and be furnished with three eyes and four hands (the two) being in the boon-giving and refuge-offering poses, and (the other two) holding *kṛṣṇā* (antelope) and *paraśu* (axe)."[121] In this manner, the foundation is prepared and made ready for the construction of the temple structure itself.

Coinciding with the commencement of a given temple project, the process of creating the *mūrti* of the deity to be housed in the temple also begins under the direct guidance of the *sthapati*. Although the general steps are the same for all types of temples, it is here that differences specific to the particular deity in question begin to show themselves within the treatises on architecture. Since this portion of our analysis is concerned with the process by which the generic *vāstu* temple design is transformed into a Śiva temple, we will focus on the procedures for constructing and installing the Śiva *liṅga* (see Figure 7), the aniconic representation of Śiva found at the center of all Śiva temples.[122] It is the proper construction and consecration of the *liṅga* that draws the presence of Śiva into the temple.

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[119] Mayamatam 12.33; the Mānasāra substitutes a horn for the noose, see Mānasāra 12.99.

[120] This practice has parallels with the tradition of Buddhist relic caskets. See Subrahmanyam 1998: 56.

[121] Mānasāra 12.120-121.

[122] In the Vaiṣṇava traditions, the architect may chose from several possible *mūrti* forms of Viṣṇu depending on what his specific intentions are for the temple. For example, the Śrīpraśna Saṃhitā 11.1-11, states, "Bhagavān declares that there are six

The critical component, or keystone, of the temple is the embodiment of Śiva at the center of the structure. According to the Vāstu-Śāstras and Āgamic literature, there are three ways in which Śiva can be represented in material form: *niṣkala*, *sakala*, and *mukhaliṅga*. The literal translation of these terms is "without parts," "with parts," and "*liṅga* with faces," respectively. The Vāstu-Śāstras and Āgamas explain that these three classifications refer to the *liṅga* (*niṣkala*), the anthropomorphic figure (*sakala*), and the *liṅga* with an image of Śiva emerging from the shaft (*mukhaliṅga*). The Mayamatam describes them this way: "It is said that there are three sorts of representations of the god, symbolic, iconic and mixed. Those which are symbolic (*niṣkala*) are called Liṅga; the iconic (*sakala*) are called 'image'; the Mukhaliṅga is a combination of these two and is similar to the Liṅga as to shape and height."[123]

Of the many types of possible *liṅga*s, two are most common to Śiva temples: the *svayambhū liṅga* (self-born) and the *mānuṣa liṅga* (man-made).[124] The *svayambhū liṅga* is one that is naturally formed and is considered to be already fully enlivened by Śiva.[125] As such it is not subject to consecration ceremonies. It is also not subject to the rigid requirements of *mānuṣa liṅga*s and therefore may come in

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styles of icon—seated, mounted on a viehicle [*yāna*], stationary and standing, with one foot raised skyward [*lokavikrama*], reclaining, and the *viṣvarūpa*-aspect. Icons may be made to represent His *avatāra*-forms." See H. D. Smith 1975: 454.

[123] Mayamatam 33.1-2a.

[124] For a list of all the possible *liṅga* types, see Manasara 1946: 441-43.

[125] Brunner 1998: p.93.

nearly any form possible and is not to be altered in any way by the sculptor.[126] *Mānuṣa liṅga*s, on the other hand, are man-made and must adhere to very strict rules of material selection and construction. They must also be enlivened through consecration ceremonies that propitiate Śiva to take up residence within them.[127] As *mānuṣa liṅga*s are the most prevalent form of *liṅga*s found in Śiva temples, they will constitute the main focus of our discussion of *liṅga*s, and we shall see that their construction and consecration are intimately woven into the fabric of the entire temple structure that they occupy.[128] *Mānuṣa liṅga*s, like all *mūrti*s, can be made of many different materials, including stone, wood, metal, and crystal, as well as temporary substances such as rice, cow dung, sand, and mud.[129] For Śiva temples, the most common *mānuṣa liṅga*, and the one we will be concerned with here, is the stone *liṅga*.

The creation of the stone *liṅga* begins with the search for the raw substance that will be fashioned into its material body. The *sthapati* and temple patron accompany a crew to the northeast section of the territory where the temple is to be built. Here, while paying close attention to the color, texture, shape, position in the

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[126] Mayamatam 33.87-91a.

[127] These consecreation ceremonies are done for all types of *murtis* in all temples. What veries are the specific *mantra*s used that correspond to the particular deity being installed. See, for example, H. D. Smith 1975: 254-55. For a description of these rules of material selection and construction as pertain to *Mānuṣa* liṅgas, see Mayamatam 33.4-86, 91b-143; Mānasāra 52. For a description of consecration rites, see Agni Purāṇa 35, 41, 43, 56-59; Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa 101, 110.

[128] This is true of the *murti*s of the other sectarian traditions as well. See, for example, H. D. Smith 1975: 266.

[129] Mayamatam 33.144-160.

ground, moisture content, and sound produced when tapped, they select the stone to be used for the *liṅga* and the *pīṭha* (pedestal).[130] The stone is then brought back to the workshop where its fashioning takes place.

While remaining monolithic, the shaft of the *liṅga* is divided into three sections arranged vertically, known as the *brahmābhāga, viṣṇubhāga,* and *rudrabhāga* portions of the *liṅga*.[131] These sections are either equal in size or of different proportions in relation to each other, with the largest section being the Rudra section followed by the Viṣṇu and then the Brahmā sections, or with the Viṣṇu and Brahmā sections equal in size. The top section is termed *rudrabhāga* and forms the visible portion of the *liṅga* that emerges from the *pīṭha*. This section is cylindrical in shape and has a rounded top (see Figure 7). The middle section is called *viṣṇubhāga* and forms the portion of the shaft that is concealed by the surrounding *pīṭha*. This section is octagonal in shape. The bottom section is *brahmābhāga* and is the portion of the shaft that is embedded in the *brahmaśilā*, which is situated in the floor of the *garbhagṛha*. This Brahmā portion of the *liṅga* is square.[132] The dimensions of the

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[130] Mayamatam 33.4-19a. The Vaiṣṇava Saṃhitās speak of a similar selection process regarding stone. See, for example, Hayaśīrṣa Saṃhitā 15. 21-51.

[131] The Rudra portion may often be called *Iśabhāga* as well as *pujabhāga*. See Mayamatam 33.67; Brunner 1998: 90.

[132] Matsya Purāṇa 263.12-21; Agni Purāṇa 53.1-5; Mānasāra 52.104-131; Mayamatam 33.67. Gritli von Mitterwallner has shown that the earliest physical evidence of the *liṅga* indicates that the tripartite model was a later development (Mitterwallner 1984: 21-23). Though the tripartite linga is not the only type of *liṅga* found, it does constitute the paradigmatic *mānuṣa liṅga* as found in the Purāṇic, Vāstu and Śilpa texts. It is already present in the Matsya Purāṇa (fourth century) and may even have roots in the Vedic *yūpa*, or sacrificial post, with its square base,

pīṭha that serves as the pedestal from which the *liṅga* emerges are to be proportionate to the dimensions of the *liṅga* and fashioned out of a single piece of stone. If a stone of the needed size cannot be found, the upper and lower portions of the *pīṭha* may be constructed separately, but the upper portion must be of a single piece of stone.[133]

Once the sculpting of the *liṅga* and the *pīṭha* are complete, they are transferred to the temple site and housed in a temporary shed called a *yāgaśālā*, which has been set up outside the temple proper. In this temporary structure a series of altars are set up with fire pits for offerings. A central water-pot representing the main deity—in this case, Śiva—is placed on the altar with several subsidiary water-pots dedicated to the deities of the surrounding directions. Offerings are made to these water-pots throughout the construction of the temple.[134] Preliminary consecration rites take place in the *yāgaśālā*, including the inscribing of the *lakṣaṇa*s (distinguishing marks) and the opening, or chiseling, of the eyes of the *liṅga* before its formal installation and consecration.[135]

At the appropriate time in the construction of the temple, the *liṅga* is installed in the *garbhagṛha* of the temple, where the final rites of *prāṇapratiṣṭhā*, establishment of the life-breath of the deity, are performed. The timing of this installation is dictated by the general size of the *liṅga*. The Mayamatam states, "The

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octagonal shaft, and smooth tenon extension over which the *caṣāla* slides (see Biardeau 2004: 38, n. 11 and 39, fig. 2).

[133] On dimensions, see Mayamatam 34.4-10a. On monolith vs. multiple pieces, see Mayamatam 34.40b-41.

[134] Fuller 2004: 45, 53; Clothey 1983: 187; Agni Purāṇa 56.16-30, 57.1-26.

[135] For signs, see Mayamatam 33.101-143; Brunner 1978: 90. For eye-opening see Mānasāra 70. 69-72.

wise man installs a small Liṅga in a finished temple; it is when a temple is half built that a medium Liṅga is to be installed and a large one is installed when the base has been constructed."[136] Regardless of when the *liṅga* enters the *garbhagṛha*, the temple construction is carried out in direct relationship to it, as the dimensions of the temple and the *liṅga* are proportionate to one another.[137]

The actual placement of the *liṅga* is to be slightly to the northeast of the center of the *garbhagṛha*. In his commentary on the verse in the Mayamatam that discusses this placement, Dagens explains:

> This passage deals with the placing of the liner (*brahmaśilā*) which supports the pedestal . . . and which is to be slightly off-center. . . . Three parallels are to be drawn from east to west and as much from north to south: the first line, called *brahmasūtra*, goes through the center of the sanctum, another one (*śivasūtra*) runs to its left and a third one which is the *viṣṇusūtra* is between them. The center of the *brahmaśilā* is to be at the intersection of the east-west and north-south *śivasūtra*, that is to say at the north-east of the center of the sanctum.[138]

After determining the correct location in the *garbhagṛha*, the *prāṇapratiṣṭhā* of the *liṅga* begins with the setting of the *brahmaśilā* that supports the pedestal and *liṅga*. This *brahmaśilā* is to be surrounded by four stones that stick out from underneath the pedestal they support. In some texts the four stones are placed on the *brahmaśilā* and under the *pīṭha*. These five stones (the four plus the *brahmaśilā*) form what is called the *nandyāvarta* stones and assume what is known as the tortoise

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[136] Mayamatam 33.161.

[137] Mānasāra 52.11-151; Mayamatam 33.40b-64.

[138] Mayamatam 33.37b-40a, n.24.

shape.[139] Once the *brahmaśilā* is in place, the *brahmābhāga* portion of the *liṅga* is fixed in it and then the *pīṭha* is slid over the *liṅga* and set in place surrounding the *viṣṇubhāga* of the *liṅga*, while the *rudrabhāga* remains exposed, forming the visible portion of the *liṅga* (see Figure 7).[140] The whole placement procedure is accompanied by the recitation of *mantra*s. The central water-pot on the main altar is then carried from the *yāgaśālā* to the *garbhagṛha* and rites are performed that include dipping *darbha* grass into the pot and sprinkling the water on the *liṅga* while reciting *mantra*s and, in some cases, running a thread from the water-pot to the *liṅga*.[141] After these *prāṇapratiṣṭhā* rites are complete, Śiva is understood to be present in the *liṅga* and thus must be treated as such.[142]

Although Śiva is now present in the *liṅga* and is receiving the rites offered to him by the priests, his temple is still under construction. After the final bricks are put in place, the *kumbhābhiṣekam*, water-pot bathing ritual, takes place. This is the final rite of the temple's construction and consecration where the golden *kalaśa* that crowns the temple's tower is put in place.[143] The culminating rite of this final ceremony is the pouring of the water from the water-pots over the *kalaśa* and the

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[139] Mānasāra 52.176-178; Mayamatam 34.50; *Mayamatam* 1994: 795, n. 23; *Somaśambhupaddhati* 1998: 206, fig. 2; Brunner 1998: 90, n. 8.

[140] Brunner 1998: 94.

[141] Fuller 2004: 56, 58; Clothey 1983: 188-89; H. D. Smith 1975: 221.

[142] H. D. Smith 1975: 221; Vishnudharmottara Purāṇa 3.111-12, 114.

[143] Clothey 1983: 189.

temple structure.[144] By this act, the instantiation of the deity is complete and with it the temple.

Semantics of Temple Construction and Consecration

Now the temple is done and Śiva is embodied within it, but we still have not answered the question, how did he get in there? If we go back to the beginning, we will see that his presence has been increasingly infused in the temple at every step of its construction.

As we have seen, the *vāstu*-designed temple is homologous to the Vedic fire altar and the primordial Puruṣa that the altar reconstructs.[145] But Puruṣa is not the main deity of the temple, Śiva is—at least in this case. So how is this dual personality of the resident deity and the Puruṣa that the temple represents reconciled? In the Śaiva context it is explained that they are one and the same. From the Śaiva perspective, the primordial Puruṣa of Ṛg-Veda 10.90 is none other than Śiva himself,[146] while in the Vaiṣṇava tradition Kṛṣṇa is recognized as the Puruṣottama. In this way, the presence of Śiva in the center of the temple is woven into the fabric of the *vāstupuruṣamaṇḍala* underpinning the temple and its associations with the Vedic fire altar and the primordial Puruṣa. The seed of this correspondence between Śiva and the Puruṣa can be found in the placing of Śiva's attributes in the center of the *maṇḍala* inside the *garbhapātra* that is buried in the pit filled with water in the foundation of the temple. The lotus that the *garbhapātra* sits on is homologous to the lotus leaf afloat on the

[144] Fuller 2004: 40.

[145] See Chapter 1 of this study.

[146] See Davis 1991: 123.

primordial waters at the dawn of creation, and thus the *garbhapātra* is the seedling at the moment of the manifestation of the material world. This *garbhapātra* is the fetus in the womb of *vastu* (the earth) that will give birth to *vāstu* (the temple) enlivened as Śiva.

Raw Materials

Although Śiva's presence has been woven into the *maṇḍala* buried deep in the foundation of the temple-to-be, the focal point through which he will permeate the entire structure is the *liṅga*. His eventual embodiment in the *liṅga* so profoundly influences the entire process of the temple's construction that its enlivened quality can be recognized at every step of the creation—so much so that even the raw materials from which the *liṅga* will be constructed are considered to be living, gendered, and a particular age.[147]

All this must be taken into serious consideration when the search party heads out to the northeast of the territory—the direction associated with Śiva and his abode—in search of the proper *liṅga* candidate.[148] With regard to the stones that the search party will come across, the Vāstu-Śāstras describe how to distinguish between the living characteristics embedded within them in order to determine the best stones for the project.

> A stone is said to be "male" when it is of uniform colour, dense, smooth and perfectly cylindrical and when it gives off the sound of an elephant bell. A "female" stone has a wide bottom and a narrow head

[147] The consideration of the living, gendered, and aged quality of the stone is not limited to the Śaiva traditions. See Hayaśīrṣa Saṃhitā 15. 21-51.

[148] On Śiva's association with the northeast, see for example, Hiltebeitel 1988: 215.

> and gives off the sound of a cymbal. A "neuter" stone has a narrow top and bottom, a wide median part and gives off no sound.
>
> The sage makes an iconic [*niṣkala*], symbolic [*sakala*] or mixed [*mukhaliṅga*] representation with a "male" stone but commits no error if he makes the image of a female deity or a pedestal with a "female" stone. A "neuter" stone is used to make "Brahmā's stone" and "Kumar's stone" as well as the "*nandyāvarta* stone." The sensible man will build the base, the walls and other parts of the temple, in the same way.[149]

Thus, the *liṅga* should be constructed from a male stone, since it will eventually embody Śiva; the *pīṭha* should be constructed from a female stone, since it will eventually embody Śakti; and the *brahmaśilā* should be neuter, since it will eventually embody Brahman.

The text of the Mayamatam continues by next turning its attention to the age of the stone.

> These (male, female and neuter) stones may be of three sorts, "young," "mature" or "aged."
>
> A "young" stone is soft when struck by an implement such as a hatchet and it gives off a sound similar to that of a partly baked brick. Connoisseurs proscribe the use of these stones for anything at all.
>
> A "mature" stone is smooth and round and gives off a deep sound; it is "cold" and sweet, is not fragmented and it glows; this stone "in the prime of its life" is suitable for every sort of use and contributes to the success of all work (for which it is used).
>
> An "aged" stone, rough as a toad's or fish's skin is not auspicious; it has "streaks," "spots" and "stains" and great care is to be taken that it be set aside.[150]

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[149] Mayamatam 33.8-12a.

[150] Mayamatam 33.12b-16a.

A mature stone is the most suitable for temple and *mūrti* construction, while an aged stone should be avoided all together.

The Mayamatam continues by discussing the "body" of the stone.

> A stone is quarried out, its face is on the underneath; its upper part is its head and, when the bottom is to the south (or the) west, the head is to the north or (east). When the rock lies vertical in the ground, the head is above and the bottom below. (A stone lying) south-west (to north-east) has its head in the north-east whereas, when north-west to south-east, its head is in the south-east.[151]

This recognition of the head and face of the stone allow the *sthapati* to determine which end of the stone is to be the *rudrabhāga* as well as where the *lakṣaṇa*s are to be placed. The Mayamatam also lists the flawed characteristics of stones that must be rejected, including stones that are pregnant.[152]

From these verses it is clear that by choosing the appropriate raw material for the *liṅga*, the *sthapati* will be in possession of the mature male body in which Śiva will eventually reside. The moment this stone is unearthed, it is treated with great respect and devotion. It is honored, anointed with perfumes, wrapped in cloth, and then carried to the workshop upon a wagon accompanied by much pomp and ceremony.[153]

Symbolism of the *Liṅga*

It is in the workshop that the *sthapati* shapes the body of the *liṅga* along with its *pīṭha* and *brahmaśilā*. The *sthapati* sculpts the *liṅga* with specific characteristics that

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[151] Mayamatam 33.17a-19a.

[152] Mayamatam 33.5b-7.

[153] Mayamatam 33.31-33. For this same treatment in the Vaiṣṇava traditions, see Hayaśīrṣa Saṃhitā 16.1-50.

encompass the absolute nature of Śiva according to Śaiva theology—a nature that reveals Śiva as the ultimate unmanifest ground of the manifest universe. By the division of the stone *liṅga* into three sections—*brahmābhāga*, *viṣṇubhāga*, and *rudrabhāga*—the *sthapati* infuses the *trimūrti* (threefold form) of Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and Rudra-Śiva into the *liṅga* and thus reveals them to be contained within the absolute body of Śiva. In Purāṇic mythology these three are responsible, respectively, for the creation, maintenance, and destruction of the universe. Their presence in the *liṅga* is a direct reference to the myth of the *liṅga* of light, which tells the story of Brahmā's and Viṣṇu's attempts to discover the source of an endless column of light, after which Śiva steps forward and reveals himself as the power behind it all.[154]

These three divisions of the *liṅga* also evoke the Vedic cosmological model of the three worlds: earth, midregions, and heavens. This is reflected by the shape that each of the sections takes. The *brahmābhāga* is square, which in the Vedic tradition corresponds to the shape of the earth. The *viṣṇubhāga* is octagonal and evokes the eight directions of the midregions, while the cylindrical shape of the *rudrabhāga* recalls the circular shape used by the Vedic tradition to symbolize the heavens. In this way, the *liṅga* is cosmologically configured in such a way as to encompass the entire manifest cosmos.

The *liṅga* and its *pīṭha* are correlated with the male and female principles, respectively. In this way, when they are joined we are witnessing the union of Śiva with his Śakti—a union that, from the Śaiva perspective, is synonymous with the

[154] For a discription of this myth, see Kramrisch 1981: 159.

manifestation of the material world, which will be further elaborated in our discussion of *pratiṣṭhā*. This dual nature of Śiva/Śakti in the *liṅga/pīṭha* is grounded in and supported by the undergirding foundation stone, or *brahmaśilā*, which is neuter. This neuter quality points to the foundation stones association with Brahman, which is neuter, and is identified with Śiva in his impersonal absolute nature as the ultimate ground of all existence from which the gendered pair Śiva and Śakti burst forth into manifestation.[155] The *brahmaśilā* is further linked to Brahman through its position in the center of the *garbhagṛha*, which corresponds to the *brahmasthāna* (central quadrant) at the center of the *vāstupuruṣamaṇḍala*. The *brahmasthāna* is the place of Brahman in an architectural structure and is associated with *ākāśa*, the space from which manifestation arises.

Dimensions and Proportions

This embodiment in the *liṅga* by Śiva is distributed to the entire temple through the *liṅga*'s dimensional relationship to its surrounding structure. The dimensions of the *liṅga* and its *pīṭha* are proportionate to the dimensions of the *garbhagṛha*. In this way, the *mūrti* and the temple structure are tied to each other. Changing the dimensions of one will automatically change the dimensions of the other. Although it is not clear which one is informing the other, what is most important here is that by being proportionally locked to one another the entire structure functions as a single unitary mechanism for instantiating the presence of Śiva. These proportions can be construed in a variety of ways, as is thoroughly explained in both the Mānasāra and the

[155] Viṣṇu *mūrti*s are also to be placed on neutered stone. See Hayaśīrṣa Saṃhitā 38.

Mayamatam, giving the *sthapati* an array of possibilities through which he can construct the *mūrti*/temple relationship.[156] This allows for a rather fluid creative influence by the architect within seemingly restrictive design parameters. The measurements utilized for determining such dimensions can be derived from the body of the temple patron himself. In such cases, he too is drawn into a proportional relationship with the *liṅga* and the *garbhagṛha*.[157]

Yāgaśālā

As noted earlier, once the sculpting of the *mūrti* is complete, it is transferred to the *yāgaśālā*. This temporary structure is a critical component in the process of establishing Śiva's presence in the temple. This space acts as a staging ground for invoking the divine power that is to become embodied in the site upon its completion. In commenting on the significance of this space, Fred Clothey explains its relation to the eventual embodied power of the temple:

> A small space is set apart as a sacrificial room (Skt. *Yāgaśālā*; Tamil *yākacālai*), which serves as a surrogate "temple" and a ritual universe. This space is purified and sacralized and the power of the divine invoked therein. Elements to be installed within the permanent temple—and figuratively that temple itself—are empowered and sacralized in the *yāgaśālā*. The power and sacrality are transferred, in effect, from the small "room" to the larger temple.[158]

The altars and fire-pits of this temporary structure are constructed for the sole purpose of invoking and increasing the divine presence that will eventually inhabit the temple. The focal point of this ritual process is the water-pot of the central altar

[156] Mānasāra 52.11-151; Mayamatam 33.40b-64.

[157] Mānasāra 52.11-15,59-64; Puruṣottama Saṃhitā 8.1-6; Acharya 1979: 441.

[158] Clothey 1983: 184.

and its subsidiary water-pots, for it is in this water that the supercharged power of Śiva is first invoked. C. J. Fuller alludes to the presence of the divine in this water: "In the center of each *yāgaśālā* was an altar (*vedi*) on which pots of water containing the deities' power would be placed."[159] In his observations concerning the installation ceremonies at a Viṣṇu temple near Pittsburgh, Clothey refers to this same divine presence in the water-pots: "Into these vessels, Viṣṇu was invoked and invited to be present for the entire ritual. These vessels become the surrogate presence of the god, from which the god's power was eventually transferred to the permanent icons."[160]

This flow of power between *mūrti* and water-pot can be a two-way flow. In his highly informative account of an enormous restoration project performed on the entire Mīnākṣī-Sundareśvara temple compound in Madurai, Fuller gives an account of the removal of all the divine power of the temple into water-pots so that the material structure of the temple could be repaired without causing pain or discomfort to the presiding deities. Fuller describes the transfer of the divine power of one of the deities: "A priest . . . took a handful of flowers and moved them down from the Vināyaka image's head to a pot of water resting at his feet, as if he were sweeping the power from the image to the pot, and he then put some flowers on the pot. Another priest pronounced the mantras to effect the transfer of power."[161] These pots were then taken to a *yāgaśālā* that had been set up to act as the substitute temple during the

[159] Fuller 2004: 45.
[160] Clothey 1983: 187.
[161] Fuller 2004: 51.

restoration project. Water-pots containing the presence of the main deities, Mīnākṣī and Sundareśvara, were also transferred to this temporary structure.[162] These examples serve to illuminate the understanding of the divine presence contained in the water-pots and the importance of the *yāgaśālā* as a temporary abode for Śiva prior to instantiating him in the temple.

The ceremonies conducted in the *yāgaśālā* entail elaborate fire rituals, which serve to further infuse the water-pots with divine power. Fuller observes, "Each set of eight priests tending the fires closest to the main deities' altars carried handfuls of flowers to the principal priests, who dropped them into their fires, before walking in front of the altars to throw flowers over them. Through this 'uniting' ritual (*saṃyojana*) of the flowers, the power generated in all the sacrificial fires was amalgamated and transferred to the water-pots on the altars."[163] It is into this highly charged ritual atmosphere that the newly sculpted *liṅga* first appears at the temple site.

Lakṣaṇas

In the *yāgaśālā* the *liṅga* is prepared for its eventual installation in the *garbhagṛha*. Here the final tooling of the sculpture is performed with the inscribing of the *lakṣaṇa*s (distinguishing marks) and the chiseling of the eyes. The *lakṣaṇa*s are a series of lines inscribed on the *rudrabhāga* portion of the *liṅga* (see Figure 8) and consist of "a central 'canal' (*nāla*), limited by two vertical lines, deeply incised, and two side-lines

[162] Fuller 2004: 51-52.

[163] Fuller 2004: 55.

(*pārśva-* or *pakṣarekhā*) which form two symmetrical curves in the front before meeting at the back."[164] Brunner argues that these lines directly suggest the sexual nature of the *liṅga* as phallus. Even so, she emphasizes that the *liṅga* must be understood as the full embodiment of Śiva.

> It is the representation of the pure Spirit called Śiva—not only of a limited part of the body of Śiva, his *membrum virile*, but of Śiva Himself. It is Śiva. In the same way, the *pīṭha* is his Wife Herself (Umā, Gaurī, or any other name)—a statement which is represented everywhere. But the Śaivas of old have chosen to represent the two deities in this context by those parts of their anthropomorphic bodies which they conceived as essential: the phallus and the vagina as organs of creation.[165]

In this regard, the *lakṣaṇa*s can be recognized as pointing to Śiva's nature as cosmic creator.

Eye-Opening

The final stage of preparing the body of the *liṅga* for the presence of Śiva is the chiseling or opening of the eyes. This takes place in the *yāgaśālā* before the *liṅga* is actually installed in the temple.[166] It is said that the opening of the eyes draws light

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[164] Brunner 1998: 90.

[165] Brunner 1998: 92. In her note on this passage, Brunner comments that, "The Goddess, when alone, is represented by a statue." See Brunner 1998: 92, n.14. Mitterwallner argues that there is no evidence of the *pīṭha* as *yoni* until the Tantric period and that the recognition of the *liṅga/pīṭha* as the union of Śiva/Śakti is a late adaptation. However, this union is referred to in Agni Purāṇa 92.1 (ninth century) and may have its predecessor in the Vedic *yūpa* and its *caṣāla*, which, as Biardeau asserts, is representative of the union of the male and female aspects of the Vedic sacrifice—fire and earth, *yajamāna* and *patnī*. See Mitterwallner 1984; Biardeau 2004: 35, 38, n. 11, 40-41.

[166] Mānasāra 70.1-118.

into them, giving them the ability to see. The Mānasāra describes the eye-opening as follows:

> The lines of the right eye should be drawn and the black ball (iris) and the sight ball (pupil) should be marked (lit., meditated on), and the sun hymn should be invoked (in order to bring in light to the eyes); thereafter the moon hymn should be uttered for (illuminating) the left eye. The (third) eye should be marked on the forehead, and the fire hymn (*agni-bīja*) should be pronounced (in order to kindle it). [167]

After the eyes are opened, the *sthapati* meditates on the deity in the *liṅga* and worships the *liṅga*. Then the *sthapati* performs *pradakṣiṇa* (circumambulation) of the village with the *liṅga*, [168] a practice that the *liṅga*'s *utsavamūrti* (festival image) will continue to perform in future festivals in place of the *liṅga*, which will become immovable after its installation. On such occasions, the life-force of Śiva present in the *liṅga* is invoked to temporarily enter into the *utsavamūrti* so that it can survey its territory and grant *darśan* to devotees.[169]

Prāṇapratiṣṭhā

With its *lakṣaṇa*s marked and its eyes opened, the *liṅga* is now ready for installation in the *garbhagṛha* where it will receive the life-breath of Śiva and become fully enlivened.

First, the physical sculpture of the *liṅga* must be moved into its position in the *garbhagṛha*. As previously mentioned, the northeast is the direction associated with Śiva and his abode, and it is slightly to the northeast of the center of the *garbhagṛha*

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[167] Mānasāra 70.69-72.

[168] Mānasāra 70.93-98.

[169] For a description of *utsava* images and their purpose, see Davis 1997: 19-20.

that the *liṅga* is placed.[170] After first setting the *brahmaśilā* and the *nadyāvarta* stones, the *brahmābhāga* of the *liṅga* is fixed in the *brahmaśilā*. The *pīṭha* is then slid over the *liṅga*. It is with this motion of the *pīṭha* sliding over the *liṅga* accompanied by *mantra*s that the union of Śiva and Śakti takes place. Verse 4.1.1 of the Somaśambhupaddhati states, "The *liṅga* is Śiva. The *pīṭha* is Śakti, and the *pratiṣṭhā* is their Union, with the help of mantras."[171] In Śaiva theology this union of Śiva with Śakti is the union of the absolute Godhead (Śiva) with his creative force (Śakti), giving rise to the manifest universe. On the basis of this verse, Brunner argues that this moment of the physical union of the *liṅga* with its *pīṭha* is the *pratiṣṭhā* proper.[172]

There are several rites of great significance that transpire after the physical setting of the stone. These entail the transfer of power from the water-pots to the *mūrti* as well as the imposition of *mantra*s on the *liṅga*. This imposition process is called *nyāsa*, by which the priest draws Śiva's presence down into his own heart and then projects him into the *liṅga* by means of *mantra* recitation. Brunner further explains the process of instantiation brought about by *prāṇapratiṣṭhā*: "A ritual preparation, which may last several days, transforms the stone into the body (*mūrti*) of Śiva by making it, through a series of *nyāsa*, inhabited by the God and by several

[170] Mayamatam 33.37b-40a.

[171] Somaśambhupaddhati 4.1.1.

[172] Brunner 1998: 95.

groups of associated divinities. In the same way, the big ring called *piṇḍikā* [*pīṭha*] is ritually transformed into the body of the Goddess."[173]

The transfer of power from the water-pots to the *liṅga* is achieved by the use of *darbha* grass, which the priest dips into the water in the pot, after which he sprinkles the water on the *liṅga* while requesting the deity to enter into the stone body that has been prepared for it.[174] Smith summarises the Pādma-Saṃhitā instructions as follows, "Then the *ācārya* ceremoniously takes the icon and the pots from the *yāgaśālā* to the sanctuary, and there he sees that the icon is fixed in its proper place (17-30), and cemented there (31-33). Then he requests the Lord to come from the pot and dwell in the iconic form; only after this does he ask the Lord in His *parivāra* forms to infuse Himself in the *parivāradevatā*s (34-38a)."[175] Similarly, the Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa proclaims, "I invoke the lord who is the support of all the good qualities who is the birthplace of the world, and greater than the greatest. . . . The god in the form of *jīva* (the soul) I pray you come and personally enter in this Arcā-Pratimā."[176]

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[173] Brunner 1998: 95. The process of *pratiṣṭhā* is not limited to *mūrti*s. As the Pauṣkara Saṃhitā explains, this process of enlivenment can be extended to sacred texts, food for distribution, fire for sacrificial offerings, or even a cow that is then allowed to wander and bless all that it comes into contact with. See Pauṣkara Saṃhitā 41.

[174] Fuller 2004: 58.

[175] Pādma-Saṃhitā 28.17-38a, cited in H. D. Smith 1975: 221. See also Clothey 1983: 188-89.

[176] Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa 3.102.6

The *liṅga* of the temple is linked through the water-pots to the generative power of the ritual space of the *yāgaśālā* and the fires within it. These fires coupled with *mantra*s have acted as engines pumping power into these temporary vessels, which are now directing their divine power toward the *liṅga*. Fuller's observations make this connection between the *yāgaśālā* and the *liṅga* installed in the *garbhagṛha* clear and reveal the intended directional flow of divine power:

> During the final sacrifice-worship, two long ropes with gold and silver threads fastened to them were extended between the *pradhāna ācārya*s' fires, the main vessels on the altar, and Mīnākṣī's image and Sundareśvar's *liṅga*. Through the ritual of the ghee and via the linking threads, the power generated in their respective fires was conveyed and conducted directly to the image and *liṅga*, which were now being reconnected to the vessels for the first time since the transfer of the deities' power.[177]

Through these consecration ceremonies, the priest invites Śiva to enter the *liṅga*. The Āgamas stress that the presence of Śiva in the object transforms that object, enlivening it—literally, "establishing its life-breath" (*prāṇapratiṣṭhā*)—and they point out that it is this presence of Śiva within the object that is worshiped, not the object alone.[178] Richard Davis states, "The analogy used most frequently in the āgamas to conceptualize this process is that of the soul entering a human body. Śiva, like the soul, is essentially consciousness (*cit*), while the *liṅga*, like the body, is composed of inanimate substance (*jaḍa*). When properly invoked, Śiva enters into the transformed *liṅga* as a soul penetrates a newly born human body."[179]

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[177] Fuller 2004: 56.

[178] Davis 1991: 122.

[179] Davis 1991: 119.

Śiva has now arrived, fully embodied in the *liṅga*, and he is treated as such. At this point in the *pratiṣṭhā*, the Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa, for example, instructs the priests that the Lord in the form of the *liṅga* should be bathed, fanned, dressed in fine clothes, bejeweled, fed, covered by a royal umbrella, and soothed with fine music.[180] Then, after a three-day respite, the daily worship required to properly honor the living presence of Śiva, as declared in the Āgamas, is begun.[181]

Kumbhābhiṣeka

As mentioned earlier, the establishment of the fully enlivened *liṅga* and the worship it demands can occur at several points in the construction process depending on the size of the *liṅga*. If it is a small *liṅga*, the installation will happen towards the completion of the temple. If the *liṅga* is of medium size, it will be installed in the middle of the construction, whereas if the *liṅga* is large, the *pratiṣṭhā* will take place once the plinth has been laid.[182] Regardless of when it is installed, the *liṅga* must be tended to, although the enlivening process is not entirely complete until the last rites are performed on the completed temple structure.

These final rites are known as the *kumbhābhiṣeka*, in which the golden *kalaśa* that acts as the temple's finial is installed. Further consecration ceremonies then take place in order to distribute the *prāṇa* of Śiva already present in the *liṅga* throughout the entire surrounding temple structure. It is at this point that the temple is transformed from the abode of Śiva into the actual body of Śiva. Clothey comments,

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[180] Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa 3.111-12, 14.
[181] Brunner 1998: 96-97; H. D. Smith 1975: 221.
[182] See Mayamatam 33.161.ṣ

"By means of the *kumbhābhiṣeka*, the temple itself, and especially the temple tower, is 'set up' or installed as an embodiment of the divine presence."[183] The culminating rite of this ritual is the pouring of the water from the pots over the *kalaśa* and temple tower. Recalling the re-instantiation of this power back into the restored Mīnākṣī-Sundareśvara temple, Fuller notes, "By pouring the water, all the power within it was transferred back to the temple, to both the towers and the images housed within it."[184] This notion of the embodied nature of the temple structure is evident from the traditional understanding that those who are forbidden to enter the temple can receive the *darśan* of the lord by merely seeing the superstructure of his temple.[185] This presence of the divinity, although initially activated and centered in the *liṅga*, radiates outward, permeating the entire physical structure of the temple itself. In this regard, Kramrisch has likened the temple structure to the body of the deity, with the *liṅga* pulsing deep in the interior of the structure acting as its *jīva*, or life-force.[186] Thus, in this perspective the *vāstu*-designed temple is understood as the living and breathing body of the divine—a localized instantiation of the all-pervading, formless absolute.

[183] Clothey 1983: 189.
[184] Fuller 2004: 58.
[185] Kramrisch 1946: 107.
[186] Kramrisch 1946: 359.

CHAPTER 3
Mīnākṣī-Sundareśvara and Lord Viṭṭhal

Once the life-force of a deity is established within a given temple, it becomes a living member of the surrounding community. Although this living presence is considered absolute, it is not stagnant or unchanging but is rather dynamic and interactive, and it is the encounter with this dynamic life-force of the deity by its community of devotees over time that gives definition to the temple's unique expression of divine embodiment resting at its core. We will now look in depth at two such divine instantiations: the Śrī Mīnākṣī-Sundareśvara Temple, a Śiva temple compound in the center of Madurai; and the Viṭṭhal Temple, a Viṣṇu temple in Paṇḍharpur.

The Mīnākṣī-Sundareśvara Temple of Madurai

Madurai is located in the extreme south of the Indian peninsula and is associated with the seat of the Pāṇḍyas, one of South India's three great dynasties. The town is one of the oldest urban centers in India and is known to have existed for at least two thousand years, although the present configuration of the town is only traceable to the twelfth century. It is constructed on the *vāstupuruṣamaṇḍala*, the undergirding grid pattern that is believed to interconnect and enliven all areas within its boundaries. At the core of this ancient and sacred city lies the Mīnākṣī-Sundareśvara Temple complex, a Śiva temple compound.

From the point of view of the devotee, the history of the Mīnākṣī-Sundareśvara Temple is a history of divine embodiment in space and place. William Harman explains, "The Hindu devotee who worships in Madurai, and who does so from the perspective of the sacred history of that city, sees Madurai quite differently from the way the casual tourist sees it. His experience constitutes a revelation of Sundareśvara's grace and presence."[187] I would suggest that this grace and presence are woven into the historical layers embedded in the physical space of the temple. This section of my analysis will explore some of the ways in which the living presence of the Mīnākṣī-Sundareśvara Temple has been expressed and encountered by its devotees over time.

Configuration of Architectural Space

The town of Madurai is a *maṇḍala* made up of four concentric square streets. A fifth street—marking the location of the medieval ramparts and moat, which were dismantled by the British in the early nineteenth century—further circumscribes the town, delineating its medieval boundary (see Figure 9). At the center of this *maṇḍala* is a square fifteen-acre temple compound—itself made up of several concentric walls—surrounding at its core the two temple shrines of Sundareśvara, the local form of Śiva, and his consort, Mīnākṣī, the town goddess (see Figure 10).

The Sundareśvara temple consists of the *garbhagṛha* in which the *liṅga* is established (#16 of Figure 10). Rising above this sanctum is a golden-capped *vimāna* (temple tower). Extending in a line eastward off this structure are three *maṇḍapa*s, or

[187] Harman 1987: 3.

halls—the *antarālamaṇḍapa*, *mukhamaṇḍapa*, and *mahāmaṇḍapa*, respectively (#17, 18, 19). Although the *garbhagṛha* and its *vimāna* alone are considered by the Vāstu-Śāstras to be the functioning Hindu temple, this sanctum and its adjoining *maṇḍapa*s form what is understood to be the larger Sundareśvara shrine. Surrounding this shrine is the first of several concentric enclosing walls forming a corridor, *prākāra*, running between it and the shrine. Along the inside of this first wall are located several subsidiary shrines. In the middle of the eastern end of this surrounding wall is a gate-tower (*gopura*), which acts as the only entrance to this innermost square. Directly across from this *gopura*, to the east, sits Śiva's mount, Nandī (#64), with his gaze fixed on his lord instantiated in the *garbhagṛha* at the other extreme end of this east-west axis. Nandī is situated within the second *prākāra*, which is formed by the second concentric enclosing wall. Running along the inside of the second wall are several more *maṇḍapa*s and subsidiary shrines. The second wall is marked off by four more *gopura*s, each delineating one of the four cardinal directions.

To the southwest of the Sundareśvara shrine and its first *prākāra* sit another *garbhagṛha* and *vimāna* (#1), with a stone image of Mīnākṣī installed in its sanctum. As with the Sundareśvara shrine, three *maṇḍapa*s (#2, 3, 4) extend eastward surrounded by a wall, forming the larger Mīnākṣī shrine. In the northeast corner of this *prākāra* is the bedchamber (Tam. *paḷḷiyarai*) of the divine couple (#8). Another *prākāra* is formed by a second wall further circumscribing the Mīnākṣī shrine. This wall is marked off by two *gopura*s—one to the east and one to the west. It must be

noted that Mīnākṣī's shrine is smaller than that of Sundareśvara, and her *gopura*s are less imposing.

To the southeast of Mīnākṣī's shrine sits the golden lily tank (Tam. *porrāmaraikulam*). This is the traditional water-tank in which devotees bathe before continuing on for the *darśan* of Mīnākṣī and Sundareśvara. Just to the north of the water-tank and to the southeast of the Sundareśvara shrine is the area where the kitchens are situated. To the northeast of the water-tank and in line with Mīnākṣī's *garbhagṛha* is Mīnākṣī's easternmost *gopura*.

Another large *prākāra* surrounds the two shrines and the water-tank. This *prākāra* is marked off by the outermost wall of the compound in which several *maṇḍapa*s and many other subsidiary shrines are located, including the thousand-pillar *maṇḍapa* located in the extreme northeast corner of the complex. The outer wall rises some twenty feet in height and is crowned by the four largest *gopura*s, each facing one of the cardinal directions and each aligned with the corresponding inner *gopura*s of the Sundareśvara shrine. Extending off the easternmost *gopura* of the complex sits another large *maṇḍapa* followed by what would have been the largest of the *gopura*s, although this seventeenth-century structure remains unfinished (see Figure 11). As the eye moves outward from Sundareśvara's *vimāna*, the *gopura*s of each successive *prākāra* become larger and taller, with those of the outermost wall reaching a height of nearly 150 feet, dominating the skyline for miles around.

Although this compound consists of the two main shrines and several subsidiary shrines, the temple proper is understood to be this entire fifteen-acre

complex.[188] This temple compound is the heart of Madurai, and the geometric pattern set by its enclosure walls ripples out into the surrounding town in the form of concentric streets, the last of which delineates the medieval boundary of the town (see Figure 9).

The origin of the temple compound is difficult to pinpoint. Literary sources of the seventh-century speak of the god of Madurai in the company of his consort and mention Madurai's *gopura*s. Physical evidence suggests that by the twelfth century there existed two small shrines to Sundareśvara and Mīnākṣī, and it is difficult to date any part of the compound before this period. At the same time, Madurai is known to have existed for at least two millennia, and since the temple compound is at the center of the town, important structures must have existed here for a long time. Some speculate that the temple site was the site of the palace prior to the onset of the *bhakti* movement from which the worship of Sundareśvara and Mīnākṣī is believed to have arisen. In any case, from the small twelfth-century shrines located where the *garbhagṛha*s of each temple are now found the compound grew outward until it reached its present configuration in the sixteenth century under the Nāyakas. Although interrupted by a brief interval of destruction under the Madurai Sultanate in the fourteenth century, this period of expansion solidified the site into one of the most significant temple traditions of the Indian subcontinent.[189]

[188] Fuller 1984: 2.
[189] See Jeyechandrun 1985: 159-201.

Embodied Śiva

That Sundareśvara's shrine is the architectural focal point of the temple compound is evident by the alignment of the east-west and north-south axes running through the principal *gopura*s of each *prākāra*. The central core of any Śiva temple is the *liṅga* established in its *garbhagṛha*, and Sundareśvara's *liṅga* accordingly functions as the central hub of the entire Mīnākṣī-Sundareśvara temple complex. All architectural activity radiates outward from the point of the enclosed *liṅga*. In fact, the historical development of the whole fifteen-acre compound begins with the recognition of Śiva's presence in this *liṅga*.

As is true with the space of all sacred complexes, the Mīnākṣī-Sundareśvara temple compound did not appear fully formed at one given moment but evolved over time. Although it has changed considerably over the centuries, the focal point of its sacred power has remained the same. What gives the site its intrinsic sacredness is the presence of the *svayambhūliṅga*, or self-born *liṅga*, a preexisting natural formation around which the temple and town are built. All else simply reaffirms its sacredness.[190] The entire expansive development of the temple compound across the fifteen-acre site is secondary to the presence of the *svayambhūliṅga* at its core. Nevertheless, these developments must be taken into consideration in order to understand the sacred value of the site, for they reflect the site's distinctive personality and are responsible for continually refashioning the manner in which this

[190] Harman 1987: 7.

embodied sacredness is encountered and re-encountered by devotees over time. Davis argues:

> The "past" does not exist as such. Rather, it exists only as it is incarnated and reincarnated in memories, texts, objects and our ongoing collective activity of reconstruction. Nor is the past that is embodied in an object a fixed quality. It comes to be transformed as its audience and the circumstances in which it is encountered are themselves transformed. The historical significance of an object may itself be reconstituted historically.[191]

And so it is with the Mīnākṣī-Sundareśvara temple. We will trace some of the ways in which the understanding of the embodied presence of Śiva in the *liṅga* and in the space of the temple has been shaped by its encounter with history and the manner in which this encounter with history has become embedded in the physical structure of the temple and the ritual activities that take place there.

As we have seen, a Hindu temple is understood to be an embodiment of the deity housed within it. In Madurai this central deity is Śiva in the form of the *svayambhūliṅga* in the *garbhagṛha* of the Sundareśvara temple. As discussed earlier, a *svayambhūliṅga* is considered to be "self-born" (*svayambhū*) and already fully enlivened with Śiva's presence, and therefore does not require rites of consecration. On any given day, this embodied nature of the *liṅga* is evident in the worship that occurs at the temple. Although Śiva is considered to be already fully embodied in the *liṅga*, a priest is charged with further enlivening this embodiment on a daily basis. Through a process of visualization and *mantra* repetition, the priest constructs a *mantra* body over the *liṅga*. By the practice of *nyāsa*, the priest then draws Śiva down

[191] Davis 1997: 85.

into his own heart, from where he projects Śiva into body of the *liṅga*. The practice is sometimes likened to that of fanning a glowing ember that then bursts into flame again. This ritual is a daily occurrence in all Śiva temples and attests to the tradition's recognition of the enlivened quality of the *liṅga*.

Although Śiva is recognized as being present in all Śiva temples, all Śiva temples are not the same. Particularly in South India, local instantiations of Śiva are recognized as unique manifestations of the deity.[192] No two are alike. Sundareśvara is only Sundareśvara in Madurai. In Chidambaram he is Naṭarāja, and in Thiruvannamalai he is Arunachaleśvara. The temple space becomes the embodiment of that particular form of the deity. It is in its existence through time, both mythical and historical, that the individual life or "personality" of the unique local instantiation of divinity takes shape and is expressed through the characteristics that identify it as Sundareśvara or as Naṭarāja and not as some other manifestation of Śiva.

In Madurai this unique manifestation of Śiva known as Sundareśvara begins with the *liṅga*. This particular *liṅga* is a natural protrusion from the earth—perhaps a petrified tree stump—and, as noted, is understood to be *svayambhū*.[193] Such a *liṅga* is not subject to the usual installation ceremonies, as Śiva is understood to already be fully present within it.[194] The *svayambhūliṅga*'s discovery dates back to the mythical founding of the town of Madurai and the temple itself. Legend has it that as Indra roamed the earth suffering from the sin of committing brahmin murder, he passed

[192] Fuller 1984: 8.

[193] Jeyechandrun 1985: 271-72.

[194] Brunner 1998: 93.

through a *kadamba* forest where he suddenly felt the burden of his sin lift. He discovered that the source of this purification was a *svayambhūliṅga* hidden in the forest. He bathed in a nearby pond filled with golden lotuses and then, making offerings of the lotuses to Śiva, he worshipped the *liṅga*. Indra continued to visit this *liṅga* once a year. On one such occasion, a traveling merchant spied Indra performing his worship, and the merchant immediately returned home to tell his king, Kulaśekara Pāṇḍya, of the natural presence of Śiva in the forest. Upon hearing of the miraculous discovery, the king moved his entire kingdom to the location of the *svayambhūliṅga*, built a shrine around it, and around that built his new kingdom—Madurai.[195]

This story, related in the Sthala-Purāṇas of the temple, maintains that the *liṅga*, the golden lily tank, and the stump of the *kadamba* tree located near Sundareśvara's shrine were already present before the temple was built. The space was already sacred, already blessed by Śiva's presence. This embodied presence was subsequently expressed through the enclosing shrine and surrounding town, and as the story continues, the temple housing the presence of Śiva takes on new layers of meaning. A descendant of this Pāṇḍyan king who had set up his kingdom around the *svayambhūliṅga* found himself without an heir to take over the throne. After making the proper sacrifice for a son, a daughter with three breasts emerged from the sacrificial fire. A voice instructed the lamenting king to raise the girl, Mīnākṣī, as a son and assured him that the extra breast would fall off upon meeting her husband. The girl grew to be a fierce warrior who conquered nearly all of the eight directions,

[195] Harman 1987: 4-5.

yet when she approached Śiva and his armies on Mount Kailāsa, she grew bashful and her third breast fell from her body. Śiva instructed her to return home, prepare for the wedding, and he would follow soon. She returned to Madurai, ascended the throne, and when Śiva arrived a few days later they were married and Śiva was crowned king of Madurai. After retiring to consummate the marriage, they strolled through the streets surveying their kingdom. Soon Mīnākṣī gave birth to their son, who eventually took over the throne from them.[196]

In this way, Śiva is understood to have come to Madurai at a specific point in time in a specific body and married into the Pāṇḍyan royal family, after which he ascended the throne and took up permanent residence in the temple with his consort, Mīnākṣī.[197] The temple, consisting of a shrine built around the existing *svayambhūliṅga*, now takes on the added significance of a divine, yet earthly, palace. In fact, the Tamil word for temple, *koyil*, also means palace.[198] Not only is this space considered to be inherently sacred due to the presence of Śiva in the *svayambhūliṅga*, but Śiva is further embodied in the space through his presence as king in his royal residence. In this way, the Sthala-Purāṇas attest that Śiva's presence in the space is the central factor in the mythical birth of Madurai as town and capital of the powerful Pāṇḍyan kingdom.

This presence of Śiva and Mīnākṣī as divine king and queen of Madurai is encountered by the worshiper on a daily basis in the temple precinct. The palatial

[196] Reynolds 1987: 31-32.
[197] Harman 1987: 11.
[198] Reynolds 1987: 12-13.

setting is undeniable, and their union is prolifically represented through numerous paintings and sculptures throughout the compound. Sundareśvara's presence as husband of Mīnākṣī, and thus king of Madurai, is expressed ritually in the daily *paḷḷiyarai pūjai*, an elaborate bedtime ritual. Every night, after the last ceremony is completed, Sundareśvara's presence is said to enter a pair of sandals (*pādukā*s), which are situated next to the *liṅga*. The *pādukā*s are carried by palanquin to a bedchamber in Mīnākṣī's shrine, where he spends the night with his wife who has similarly retired to the bedchamber via her own moveable image. In the morning the divine couple is awakened, fed, and returned to their respective sanctums for their daily duties.[199]

More notable than this daily expression of divine union is the yearly festival in honor of the marriage of Sundareśvara and Mīnākṣī, in which their wedding ceremony is reenacted using the embodied forms of their *utsavamūrti*s, festival images.[200] The highlight of this festival is when the *utsavamūrti*s are taken by wooden chariots (*ratha*s) through the streets of Madurai on a tour of their kingdom, reenacting annually the stroll that the divine couple took together on the day they where married.[201]

Through the stories of the Sthala-Purāṇas, the architectural configuration of the temple, and daily and annual rituals, the living expression of Śiva as Sundareśvara unfolds and is sustained. In this way, beyond the recognition of Śiva's presence in the

[199] Fuller 1984: 11.

[200] For an extensive study of this festival, see Harman 1989.

[201] Fuller 1984: 20.

preexisting *svayambhūliṅga*, the unique characteristics of Śiva as divine king of Madurai are layered onto the worshiper's repeated encounters with the temple space.

Although we cannot be certain how far back the original temple can be dated, from the perspective of a Hindu who worships at the Mīnākṣī-Sundareśvara temple in Madurai, Śiva has been firmly instantiated in the inner sanctum of this temple since before the town's mythical founding. Just as the *svayambhūliṅga* is understood to be a full embodiment of Śiva, it is also understood to be immovable—a permanent presence, as it were. This concept of a preexisting and permanent sacred presence is a long-standing Tamil perspective regarding sacred space, one that stands in stark contrast to the Vedic notion of the temporary sacred field of the Vedic sacrifice in which a sacred presence is generated through the ritual. David Shulman comments on this matter:

> This belief attains a particular graphic expression in a series of Tamil myths, which describes attempts to remove the deity from its proper spot. The god is essentially immovable. . . . A common ritual of consecration causes the divine presence to reside in an image or a shrine; in the myths, however, this action merely reflects a preexisting relationship between the god and the site. A divine power is felt to be present naturally on the spot. The texts are therefore concerned with the manner in which this presence is revealed and with the definition of its specific attributes. Often the divinity is revealed by a self-manifesting image, usually a *svayambhūliṅga*.[202]

[202] Shulman 1980: 48. Holdrege (2014) notes that with the move from the Vedic period to post-Vedic *bhakti* traditions we witness a shift towards new modes of divine embodiment. She explores in particular four modes of embodying the divine that become prevalent with the development of post-Vedic *bhakti* traditions: *śāstra* (text), *nāman* (name), *dhāman* (place), and *mūrti* (sculpted form). Textual evidence of the notion of divine embodiment in natural formations is found as early as the Epic period (200 BCE – 200 CE). Most specifically, this can be seen in sections of the *Vanaparvan* of the *Mahābhārata*. See Busse 2007: 7, n. 3.

In Madurai this recognition of the preexisting and immovable nature of the *svayambhūliṅga* was never more apparent than in the face of certain invasion by Muslim armies during the fourteenth century. Confronted with the inevitable sacking of the temple, the Sthala-Purāṇas tell of the temple priests' ingenious plan to protect the *liṅga*, which could not be removed and hidden as the other images in the temple had been. A cage was built that fit over the *liṅga*, which was then covered with sand. The entrance to the *garbhagṛha* was walled up and in front of this wall, in the *antarālamaṇḍapa*, a proxy *liṅga* was installed according to Āgamic regulations, which was itself fully enlivened yet replaceable.[203] Although the invading armies did sack the temple, they stopped short of destroying the central shrine. When the inner sanctum was reopened more than fifty years later during the expulsion of the Muslim invaders by Vijayanagara forces, according to the Sthala-Purāṇas' account, it appeared as if the daily ritual had never been interrupted.

> All the *pūjā* materials . . . were found to be fresh as also the garland of campaca adorning the deity. Two silver lamps were full of ghee and were burning. On the removal of the garland and the sandal paste it looked as if they were adorned earlier in the morning and removed in the noon.[204]

For the devotee this account not only testifies to the miraculous nature of the *liṅga*, but it also absolves the priests of any harm they may have caused the *liṅga* by concealing it. It is a foundational dictum laid out in the Āgamas that an enlivened *mūrti* must be tended to daily. It is a living presence that must be woken up, fed,

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[203] Jeyechandrun 1985: 109, 272.

[204] Jeyechandrun 1985: 114.

dressed, honored, and put to bed every day.[205] By burying the *liṅga* in sand and walling it in, the priests were protecting it while at the same time suspending a fundamental responsibility to the presence of Śiva in the space. Yet the story reveals that the last offerings made before concealing the *liṅga* remained fresh, in a sort of stasis, through which the *liṅga* was continually honored during its period of confinement.

In this way, the story from the Sthala-Purāṇas allows the community to accept the long period of no worship and ensures the continuity of the divine presence in the temple over time. Devotees encounter the living memory of these events on a daily basis since the proxy *liṅga*, although removed in the late fourteenth century from its location in front of the *garbhagṛha*, was reinstalled to the northeast of the *antarālamaṇḍapa* in the first *prākāra* outside Sundareśvara's shrine (near #44 in Figure 10), where it continues to receive offerings.[206]

As we have seen, the living presence of Sundareśvara in Madurai is expressed through the architecture of the space and the ritual activities that take place within it. But what of Mīnākṣī's presence? Where is she enlivened? How is she made manifest, and what impact does her manifestation have on that of Sundareśvara? We have briefly encountered her in the daily bedtime ritual and annual wedding festival. Now we shall take a closer look at her involvement in the temple compound.

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[205] Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa 3.111-12, 14
[206] Jeyechandrun 1985: 272.

Embodied Mīnākṣī

Everything about the layout and construction of the temple compound indicates that Mīnākṣī's shrine is secondary to Sundareśvara's. Her *vimāna* is smaller, her *maṇḍapa*s are smaller, and her *gopura*s are smaller, both in number and size. More importantly, her shrine is set to the side of Sundaraeśvara's, which dominates the space and occupies the central position, as expressed through its alignment with the major *gopura*s moving outward toward the four cardinal directions. This is significant, for in the Vāstu-Śāstras and Śilpa-Śāstras alignment is everything. There can be no doubt that this compound was constructed to highlight the central importance of the Sundareśvara shrine and of Sundareśvara himself in the form of the *svayambhūliṅga*. From this perspective, Mīnākṣī would seem to be the dutiful consort standing by the side of her all-powerful lord. However, the physical manifestation of a specific temple compound structural composition is not everything, and in fact it can be misleading.

Mīnākṣī is an unusual goddess, and Madurai is a unique expression of her manifestation. In the Sthala-Purāṇas, beyond the initial discovery of the preexisting presence of Śiva in the *svayambhūliṅga*, Mīnākṣī is not only present in the narrative but also plays a significant role in the story of the temple and Madurai. She is the warrior queen who conquers seven of the eight directions, and by taming the eighth direction through marriage, she brings the Lord back to Madurai as her husband. Although Śiva himself ascends the Pāṇḍyan throne, Mīnākṣī's place on the throne is

never relinquished. The rule is shared by both of them.[207] This perspective is reflected in her *mūrti* in her sanctum. In the *garbhagṛha* of her shrine she stands, not next to her dominant husband, but alone as the warrior queen, for in Hindu iconography the lone goddess is representative of the fierce, untamed power associated with Durgā and Kālī. Mīnākṣī only submits to Sundareśvara at night when they are expected to unite in sexual union in their bedchamber. Not even Sundareśvara himself stands alone in his sanctum. He is always accompanied by a smaller, meeker consort on his left side, the side of the dutiful wife in Hindu society.[208] Mīnākṣī and her shrine, on the other hand, are located to the right side of Sundareśvara, a position of power and dominance in terms of relationship and a point of pride for the citizens of Madurai.[209]

Even Sundareśvara's alignment is called into question, as it is considered inauspicious to enter the temple compound through the easternmost *gopura*, the traditional point of entry for a Hindu temple, which stands in a direct line with the temple's focal point in Sundareśvara's *garbhagṛha*.[210] Instead, devotees enter through a small gate (not a *gopura*) aligned with Mīnākṣī's shrine, and it is Mīnākṣī's *darśan* that is sought first, followed by Sundareśvara's (see Figure 12).[211] In Madurai, Fuller remarks, "Mīnākṣī, not Sundareśvara, is the Temple's pre-eminent deity (*Pradhāna*

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[207] Reynolds 1987: 31.

[208] Fuller 1984: 4.

[209] Fuller 1984: 3.

[210] Jeyechandrun 1985: 9, 17-18. There are several explanations given for this, one being that the tower was the location of an apparent suicide by a temple servant who was protesting a particularly crippling temple tax by throwing himself off the top of the tower. See Jeyechandrun 1985: 18-19, n. 9.

[211] Balaram 1988: 22.

mūrti); she is always worshipped before her husband."[212] This not only refers to worship by individual devotees as they move through the temple compound but to the designated daily ritual schedule performed by the priests. "At each period, the rituals in Mīnākṣī's sanctum begin fifteen to thirty minutes before those in Sundareśvara's."[213] The focus on the goddess is also reflected in the name. Although the temple complex is formally known as the Śrī Mīnākṣī-Sundareśvara temple complex, it is commonly referred to simply as "Mīnākṣī Koyil," the Mīnākṣī temple.

As Dennis Hudson has shown, this dominant nature of Mīnākṣī has deep roots in the Madurai psyche. His exploration of early Tamil literature on Madurai reveals a long-established understanding of Mīnākṣī as not just the goddess of the town but as the town itself along with everything in it.[214] Her *śakti* (power) is manifested in the temple, palace, and surrounding town. She resides in the people of her realm, in their sexual activity. She manifests in the gates of the city as protector and extends beyond as the warrior who conquers in their name. The most fierce and isolated expression of the warrior goddess occurs as the guardian of the northern gate in the form of Cellattamman, a local Kālī-like manifestation.[215] In this regard she can be understood as encompassing the functions of the *trimūrti* of Hindu cosmology, and although this reveals her as all-pervading, she remains established in a specific location, *as* that location—Madurai.

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[212] Fuller 1984: 3.

[213] Fuller 1984: 12.

[214] Hudson 1993: 125-42.

[215] See Hoek 1979: 119-129.

> As destructive power she protected the city gates and the gates of the palace and removed the pollutions of death; she roamed at night with demons in the city's empty streets; she brought victory in war; and she was Kālī who eats the flesh and blood of demons and of sacrifices. As generative power she created harmony among gods by linking her brother Viṣṇu to Śiva through her own marriage; she created harmony among people by begetting the Pāṇḍyan dynasty; she propagated children by ensnaring men into sexual union with women, even ascetics; and she dwelled in the soil and the buildings as the fertility that produced crops and markets. The goddess Madurai embodied the destructive, creative, and protective aspects of the transcendant Śiva (*Kaṭavul*) in a particular place as a particular city.[216]

Thus, while Śiva is transcendent, Mīnākṣī is local. She *is* Madurai, and she is unique to Madurai. This concept of male power as transcendent and female power as local is common in Tamil Nadu. David Shulman explains:

> It is the goddess who is identified with the earth and with all that is indigenous and unique in the site of the shrine, who is responsible for effecting the link between the deity and his local home. In this sense the goddess is associated with the ancient concept of *pratiṣṭhā*, the firm ground of stability that makes life possible in the midst of chaos; the goddess provides the god with *pratiṣṭhā* in the one spot that is not subject to change or destruction, the center of the universe, the shrine.[217]

As this pertains to Madurai, it is well understood by the priests and devotees that the daily rituals associated with Sundareśvara are basic rites common to all Śiva temples, while many of those associated with Mīnākṣī are unique to her and her manifestation both in and as Madurai.[218] Even the universal rituals associated with Śiva can take on a unique form in Madurai. An example can be found in the daily preparatory ritual performed by all Śaiva priests in which they individually transform

[216] Hudson 1993: 136.

[217] Shulman 1980: 51.

[218] Fuller 1984: 8-9.

themselves into Śiva in order to properly propitiate their Lord—for as the Āgamas state, only Śiva can worship Śiva.[219] In Madurai during all major festivals, this self-induced transubstantiation by the priest takes place not in the presence of the *svayambhūliṅga* but in front of the goddess in the shrine of Mīnākṣī.[220]

Embodied Union

Thus, on the ground it very quickly becomes apparent that Mīnākṣī occupies the privileged position in the eyes of her devotees. She is the focal point of worship. However, this is not to the detriment of Śiva. His role is essential. In fact, as a sacred space, the temple compound can only function if they are both present. In Śaiva theology Śiva by himself remains boundless but unmanifest. In order for him to bring forth the material world, he must be united with his *śakti*. She is his manifesting power. In the microcosm that is the temple, this pairing is achieved by the union of the *liṅga* with its *pīṭha*.[221] It is also represented anthropomorphically by showing the great god with one of his consorts. In Madurai this union is understood as the fundamental spark of existence that gives rise to all multiplicity, and this multiplicity is celebrated as Mīnākṣī. Simply put, she is all of manifestation radiating outward as the temple, town, and world beyond, with Sundareśvara at its center. She is the pulse of the manifest universe emitted from the *svayambhūliṅga* at its core. As mentioned earlier, sexual union between them occurs every night, all night, in the bedchamber of

[219] Davis 1991: 44.
[220] Fuller 1984: 14-15.
[221] Brunner 1998: 94.

Mīnākṣī's shrine. Thus, the manifest world is reaffirmed daily at the center of the universe—Madurai.

In this way, Sundareśvara and Mīnākṣī can be seen to be fulfilling the purpose of the Vedic sacrifice: the continual *re*-creation and maintenance of the universe. This cosmos-maintaining role serves to unite our locally manifested and dominant goddess with her transcendent yet centrally located husband. Although Mīnākṣī can be seen as occupying a position of power in relation to her husband through her shrine's location to his right, if we recall that the structure of the Hindu temple is a solidified and continual expression of the Vedic sacrifice, Mīnākṣī can also be shown to occupy a position parallel to that of the *yajamāna*'s wife, who assures the success of the sacrifice that her husband is perpetually performing as the counterpart of the *yajamāna* and the Puruṣa Prajāpati of the Vedic sacrifice.

Varma has shown through his comparison of the *yāgaśālā* and the Hindu temple that there is a correlation between the *patnīśālā*, hall of the sacrificer's wife, in the Vedic sacrificial field and the location of the *śakti* of the main deity in a temple compound (see Figure 5). Since this is where the *yajamāna*'s wife is situated during the Vedic ceremony, it is highly charged with her presence. Stephanie Jamison points out, "The 'world' or place of the wife (patnīloka) is southwest of the 'Householder's Fire' (Gārhapatya). This is where she stays throughout the ritual except when she is led elsewhere to perform some specific task. The hut built for her in the elaborate rites like the Soma Sacrifice, the patnīśālā . . . , is constructed in this part of the ritual

ground."[222] Jamison goes on to reveal that this "domestic" area of the sacrificial field is called *jaghana*, the "hind end," and in turn relates sexually to the *patnī*.[223] She thus concludes, "So the wife is situated in a place associated by nature with sex and generation, as well as with the household and domestic sphere."[224] It makes sense that when the temple compound is mapped onto the sacrificial field, the *śakti* of the presiding deity would be located in the same area as the sacrificer's wife.

If Sundareśvara's temple, as the central temple of the compound, is situated where the *gārhapatya* fire would be in the Vedic sacrificial field, then Mīnākṣī, being to the southwest of him, is situated in the domestic area of the sacrificial field reserved for the *patnī* (see Figure 11). Mīnākṣī thus assumes a role parallel to that of the wife of the *yajamāna*, just as Sundareśvara, as the deity of the temple, assumes a role parallel to that of Puruṣa Prajāpati, who is correlated with the *yajamāna* in the Vedic ritual. Perhaps the location of Mīnākṣī serves a double purpose. On the one hand, her position to the right of her husband reflects a position of power in the relationship, while, on the other hand, her position in relation to the sacrificial field of the temple compound allows her and her husband to simultaneously fulfill their roles in the Vedic sacrifice of which the temple compound is a solidified expression. This is further supported by the movement of the daily ritual. As discussed earlier, at the end of each day Sundareśvara joins Mīnākṣī in the bedchamber of her shrine for a

[222] Jamison 1996: 40.
[223] Jamison 1996: 39-42.
[224] Jamison 1996: 42.

night of sexual union, where an interesting occurrence takes place in relation to their positioning, as Fuller explains:

> The key aspect in *paḷḷiyaṟai pūjai* is its joining together of the god and goddess, explicitly seen as lovers. Only at night are Mīnākṣī and Sundareśvara united in this way; during the day, they are in their separate sancta, Mīnākṣī by herself and Sundareśvara accompanied by Manonmanī. In the bedchamber, Mīnākṣī's image is on Cŏkkar's [Sundareśvara's] left—the reverse of the normal positioning, as mentioned above—and, because Cŏkkar is but a pair of feet, the goddess is in contact only with the lowest part of her husband's body. Thus in the bedchamber, and solely there, Mīnākṣī is represented as Sundareśvara's unequivocally inferior wife.[225]

In their nightly union Sundareśvara, as the king (Sundara Pāṇḍya) and thus patron of the temple, comes to the southwest of the main temple, where he joins his wife (*patnī*) in her portion of the sacrificial field. He sits not with her on his right, as she is situated in relation to his temple, but with her on his left, the traditional positions for the *patnī* and *yajamāna* in relation to the *gārhapatya* fire.

More explicitly, here in their bedchamber situated in her temple lying to the southwest of his temple, they are sexually united. As we have seen, the area of the sacrificial field associated with the *patnī* is also associated with sexual activity, and it is where the *patnī* and *yajamāna* are symbolically sexually united during the Vedic ritual. With regard to the Vedic sacrificial ceremony, Jamison, discussing the return of a broom to the area of the *gārhapatya* fire, comments, "The broom as male sexual symbol is not an extravagant invention of my own: the symbolism is explicitly spelled out in ritual activity. In some schools the Hotar throws the broom into the

[225] Fuller 1984: 11.

wife's lap three times, especially if she wants a son."[226] Do we have here Mīnākṣī and Sundareśvara as *patnī* and *yajamāna* engaged in perpetual sacrifice within the enclosed sacrificial field of their temple compound? Jamison further notes that while the *patnī* is marginalized in this southwest portion of the sacrificial field for the duration of the ceremony, the *yajamāna*, after beginning the ceremony in the same place, leaves to make the majority of the offerings into the *āhavanīya* fire located at the eastern end of the sacrificial field. Yet in the end he returns to the domain of his wife for the final rites of the ceremony. "The whole performance begins and ends at the *gārhapatya*—with actions centered on the wife."[227] As Fuller has shown us, Sundareśvara begins each day by leaving the bedchamber located in his wife's temple in the southwest, and with the last ritual of the day he returns to be united with her. Thus, there is strong evidence that the positioning of the Mīnākṣī temple in relation to the Sundareśvara temple has its roots in the layout and function of the Vedic sacrificial field and in this way serves to unite the divine couple while simultaneously allowing Mīnākṣī to occupy her strong and independent position.

The union of Sundareśvara and Mīnākṣī is embodied in the temple compound and the city itself. Hudson notes, "The Joining' of god and goddess in sexual union was an early and continuous meaning of the city Madurai."[228] The temple is the divine body itself, and, as Hudson has emphasized, the goddess's presence is manifested in the city and people of Madurai.

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[226] Jamison 1996: 60.

[227] Jamison 1996: 41.

[228] Hudson 1993: 132.

This understanding of the embodied nature of the temple is made clear by the process of restoration that occurred at the site in 1995.[229] As discussed earlier, in order to perform work on the physical structure of the temple, the priests had to remove all of the *prāṇa* from the entire temple compound. This is known as *kalākarṣaṇa*, "drawing out the particles," by which the priests transfer the living presence occupying the *mūrti*s into water-pots, which are then set up in a microcosmic configuration of the temple compound where daily worship continues uninterrupted. The power being transferred is understood to be so powerful that, in the case of Mīnākṣī and Sundareśvara, it was done behind closed doors for fear that exposure to such power would bring harm to any ordinary beings who were present. Moreover, the transfer was considered so complete that no worship took place inside the temple after the transfer. Instead, craftsmen were now able to work on the empty *mūrti* vessels and their surrounding structures without violating the divine power normally contained in them. Once the renovation was complete, the priests simply poured the divine power back into the complex, and regular ritual resumed in the space. This re-enlivening process is known as *kumbhābhiṣeka*. Given the size and scope of the Mīnākṣī temple compound, this made for quite an impressive moment as numerous priests scaled the tall towers of the *gopura*s and *vimāna*s of the complex for the coordinated re-infusion. C. J. Fuller gives an account of this remarkable moment:

> Around 9 a.m., a few minutes after the auspicious period set for the culminating ritual had begun, the priest in charge of the tower over

[229] For an extensive account of the entire restoration, including the re-consecration of the temple, see Fuller 2004: 40-63.

> Mīnākṣī's sanctum poured his pot of water, and almost immediately a green flag was waved to tell the second priest to pour his pot over the god's sanctum tower and all the other priests to pour theirs over the finials on the twelve gateway towers. At the same time, the priests inside were told to pour their pots over Mīnākṣī's image, Sundareśvara's *liṅga* and other images . . . . This vast simultaneous affusion is the concluding climax of the *kumbhābhiṣeka*, and it took place accompanied by the excited cheering of an enormous crowd of spectators standing in and around the Temple and on the roofs of buildings in the city, which was estimated in a newspaper report as half a million people. Many people near the towers tried to catch the water cascading down them, so that they could be blessed by its divine quality. By pouring the water, all the power within it was transferred back to the Temple, to both the towers and the images housed within it. Inside the main sancta, as soon as the water-pouring was finished, a full act of daily worship was carried out.[230]

This downward flow of divine power is significant. According to the Vāstu-Śāstras and Śilpa-Śāstras, this is the direction that divine grace takes as it descends into the temple and out to the world. We may recall that moving from a point (*bindu*) just above the tip of the finial, the sacred power of a temple is said to descend through the hollow column within the superstructure and manifest first as *ākāśa* in the *garbhagṛha* and then outward into material manifestation.[231] A. V. Jeyechandrun describes it this way:

> The cosmic spiritual descent through the vimāna into the sanctum of a temple after a link with the earth has a lateral beam projection which passes through the inner installed deity to outer space *via* the exterior g__ōpuras and then into the cosmic space again. So while the congregation converge onto the sanctum the successive charges diverge outside immersing the assembled in the spiritual ethereal bath

[230] Fuller 2004: 58.

[231] For a description of this descent into manifestation that is the temple, see Hardy 1995: 19. For a description of the point above the temple between the manifest and the unmanifest, see Kramrisch 1946: 175-76.

> and planting the seeds of cosmic genre in the submerged layers of a devotee's consciousness.[232]

In this way, the temple is not only a repository for the divine presence but also serves as a mechanism for drawing in and disseminating that presence to the world—a presence that permeates all that it comes in contact with so that on the subtlest levels it is understood that there is no difference between the divine presence, the temple structure, the town, and the people inhabiting that space. In Madurai this blending of the sacred and mundane is woven into the architectural structures where the two seemingly distinct worlds intersect, as Julian Smith has observed:

> The temple complex itself is not confined within a rigid square. Tirumala's Pāṇḍu-maṇḍapa spills out into the city fabric, and amidst the elaborate carvings are to be found tailors, brass merchants, and booksellers. Even further out the base of the unfinished Raya-gopuram gently suggests the encroachment of sacred space. Secular use, in turn, invades the enclosed temple compound; numerous small shops exist within, during the hot hours of the day it is a cool, relaxing place to sleep.[233]

This example clearly illustrates the penetrating and infusing quality of the divine presence in Madurai. Although Sundareśvara in the form of the *svayambhūliṅga* is the central point, the *axis mundi*, of the architectural configuration of the temple compound, Mīnākṣī is the generative power racing outward into the world, permeating and infusing all with her *śakti* as she goes. She is the body of the temple, while he is the sacred hub from which it manifests. Their union is the key. As it says in the Somaśambhupaddhati, their union is *pratiṣṭhā*, establishment.[234]

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[232] Jeyechandrun 1974: 367.
[233] J. Smith 1976: 64.
[234] Somaśambhupaddhati 4.1.1

Although this argument seems to put them on equal footing, we cannot forget that we are in Madurai. In accord with all other activities in the temple, when the *kumbhābhiṣeka* waters began to flow, it was Mīnākṣī who drank first.

The Viṭṭhal Temple of Paṇḍharpur

Having considered the unique manifestation of divine presence found in a particular Śaiva temple compound in Tamil Nadu, we now turn our attention to a much smaller Viṣṇu temple compound further north in the rural Deccan town of Paṇḍharpur. The town is located in the southeastern corner of the state of Maharashtra (see Figure 13). The earliest record of its existence is found in a Rāṣṭrakūṭa dynastic inscription from Kolhāpur, dated 516 CE In the inscription, the town is identified as Pāṇḍaraṅgapalli, "village of Pāṇḍaraṅga," which becomes known as Paṇḍharpur.[235] The town is situated along the banks of the Bhīmā River, where the river's generally eastern flow takes a sharp turn to the south. This portion of the river is known as Candrabhāgā and is often compared to the similar crescent shaped bend the Gaṅgā takes at Vārāṇasī in the north.

Like Madurai, Paṇḍharpur is a pilgrimage town, yet unlike its more famous Tamil counterpart, it has never been a major economic or political center, nor is it an international tourist destination. Moreover, its pilgrimage fame is mostly regional in nature, and thus the town does not have the prominent national visibility that Madurai has. Nonetheless, for those who hold it dear, it is the living sacred hub of a divine universe, and in this way it fulfills a similar sacred function for Vaiṣṇava devotees as Madurai fulfills for Śaiva devotees. The focal point of this sacred town is the Viṭṭhal Temple, which is located on a hill above the riverbed and houses a *mūrti* identified

[235] Deleury 1960: 27. The etymology of this term will be explored later in the chapter.

with Gopāla Kṛṣṇa since at least the twelfth century.[236] One possible etymological root of the name Viṭṭhal—who is also known as Viṭhobā—is Viṭṭe or Biṭṭe, a Kannaḍa term for Viṣṇu. To invoke Harman's reflections on Madurai, Paṇḍharpur can be said to be a revelation of Viṭṭhal's grace and presence.[237]

Physical Layout

The main *ghāṭ* of the town's riverfront is called Mahādvār Ghāṭ (great-door *ghāṭ*), as it faces the eastern door and main entrance of the Viṭṭhal Temple (see Figure 14). The temple compound is enclosed by a high wall running the length of its perimeter. Through the twentieth-century façade of the eastern gate, a steep flight of steps leads up through a much older stone entrance to the main level of the temple compound. Moving westward, at the top of the steps through a short hallway one enters the first and largest of the compound's *maṇḍapa*s. It is a wooden-framed structure with a very tall, exposed roof system. Within this *maṇḍapa* are several *dīpasthāna*s (oil lamp towers), a Garuḍa (Viṣṇu's *vāhana*), and a Māruti (Hanumān). At the western end of this large hall, several steps lead up to a narrow stone veranda with three doors. Moving through these doors, one enters the next *maṇḍapa*, which consists of four groups of four pillars each, giving the room its name as the sixteen-pillared hall. This portion of the compound is significantly older than the wooden *maṇḍapa*, which dates to the seventeenth century, and appears to have been part of the building program that

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[236] Dhere 2011: 140.

[237] On the roots of the name Viṭṭhal, see Deleury 1960: 126-80; and Dhere 2011: 5-7, 121-22. Regarding Harman's comments on Madurai, see Harman 1987: 3; and my introductory remarks to chapter 3.

generated the earlier stone entrance that is now surrounded by the modern façade. Moving further westward, one moves into an even smaller *maṇḍapa*, beyond which sits the *garbhagṛha*. In a niche of the back wall, several feet off the ground, Lord Viṭṭhal stands on a brick, arms akimbo (see Figure 15).

The *mūrti* of Viṭṭhal is made of black pitted stone, and is dressed in silks, anointed, and crowned. In terms of the emblems traditionally associated with Viṣṇu's iconography, he holds the conch in his left hand and the lotus in his right. However, apart from these two discernible Vaiṣṇava identifiers, the *mūrti* is quite unique in form. The image has long fish-shaped earrings and a large protrusion from the top of its head, which serves as a mold for the silver crown that continually adorns it. Although not strictly Vaiṣṇava in character, both are symbols of royalty and can therefore be appropriately linked to Viṣṇu iconography. Yet unlike most Viṣṇu *mūrti*s, this one is two-armed and thus lacks two of Viṣṇu's principal iconographic markers: the *cakra* (discus) and the mace. The most unusual aspect of the *mūrti* is its erect posture with arms akimbo and parallel feet standing on a brick. This posture is reminiscent of stone imagery of heroes found across Maharashtra, as pointed out by G. A. Deleury and Shankar Gopal Tulpule, and is also similar to Bīr Kuar (Vīr Kumār), a Bihār hero-god who is later identified with Gopāla Kṛṣṇa.[238]

Just beyond the Viṭṭhal shrine, to the northwest by a few meters, is the somewhat smaller shrine of his wife, Rukmiṇī. She is rendered in the same arms-

[238] On hero-stones and Viṭṭhal, see Deleury 1960: 165-66, 181-84; Tulpule 1978; Dhere 2011: 121-38. On memorial stones, see Sontheimer 2004abc; Harlan 2002; Coccari 1989; Khare 1982: 251-54.

akimbo posture in black stone, which is smooth rather than pitted (see Figure 16). She is also adorned in the regalia of royalty. The outer perimeter of Rukmiṇī's shrine forms the northwest corner of the temple compound. Moving along this far western wall in a southern direction, and immediately next to Rukmiṇī, are the shrines of Viṭṭhal's two other consorts, Satyabhāma and Rādhikā (Rādhā), followed by Gaṇeśa, whose shrine abuts the western gate of the compound. On the southern side of the Viṭṭhal Temple lies a courtyard with a tree surrounded by several subsidiary shrines, including one of Mahālakṣmī. Beyond this are located the various administrative offices of the temple, which form the southwestern corner of the compound.

Dating of Compound's Parts

As indicated by this description of the physical layout, the temple compound is a hodgepodge of architectural styles spanning several centuries of expansion and reconstruction. The earliest datable material evidence of the site is an inscription from 1237 CE. This inscription is located on a lentil stone that runs over the porch area just west of the large wooden *maṇḍapa* that forms the entrance to the sixteen-pillared hall. The inscription is difficult to read and is partially obscured by the capital of one of the pillars, calling into question if this is in fact the original position of the slab. As indicated by Deleury, it is more likely a remnant from an older version of the temple that was reincorporated into a later remodel or reconstruction, possibly after some kind of destruction of the temple space. Deleury believes that this is evidence of desecration by marauding Muslim armies, but Tulpule calls this theory into question, arguing that there is no known historical record of any Turko-Muslim army sacking

Paṇḍharpur. Given that Paṇḍharpur had no significant political ties, a sacking of this kind would not follow the general pattern of such actions by Muslim rulers, as Richard Eaton has shown.[239] Nonetheless, it appears that the temple compound did suffer at least one destruction, if not several, given the unusual placement of the inscription stone and the fact that the eastern gate on the far side of the wooden *maṇḍapa* has a stairway and pillars that appear to date from the same building phase as the inscription stone.

The inscription mentions the god Viṭṭhal of Pāṇḍaraṅge (Paṇḍharpur). This inscription reveals an already fully established tradition of Viṭṭhal worship at the site by this date, as does another inscription commemorating a remodel and expansion of the temple from 1273-1277 by the Yādava king Rāmcandradeva. Thus, it can be assumed that the worship of Viṭṭhal pre-dates this period by enough time for the deity to have become sufficiantly renowned so as to inspire a powerful king to support the expansion of the already existing temple compound. Moreover, Tulpule has translated another inscription from the site that speaks of a Yādava king donating money for the construction of a shrine to the local god in the year 1189.[240] Tulpule argues that this is the actual dedication date of the temple. Deleury comments on Tulpule's discovery, "There was at that time in Paṇḍharpur a group of devotees of Viṭhṭhala, and they were granted by the Yādava king Bhillama some financial assistance to build a small structure to house their god. The connection between Viṭhṭhala and Paṇḍharpur is,

[239] See Eaton 2000b.

[240] Tulpule 1979: 328-29; Deleury 1960: 191.

therefore, certain by that date and we can safely add that this connection was by then already long standing, since there was a group of devotees dedicated to this god."[241] Further supporting Tulpule's argument that this inscription marks the inception of the temple is the fact that the 1273-1277 inscription refers to itself as the "Stone of 84." This has been something of a mystery until Tulpule translated the 1189 inscription. According to Tulpule, the 1189 inscription marks the inception of the temple, while the 1273-1277 inscription marks the first significant remodel and expansion of the temple 84 years after its inception—thus, "Stone of 84."[242]

There is other evidence to suggest that the worship of Viṭṭhal had been flourishing for some time before the Yādava expansion. Literary sources push the presence of Viṭṭhal in Paṇḍharpur back before the thirteenth century. There are three purāṇic-style Sanskrit versions of the Pāṇḍuraṅga Māhātmya, which claim to belong, respectively, to the Skanda, Padma, or Viṣṇu Purāṇa. Of these three, Dhere has shown that the one that claims to be a part of the Skanda Purāṇa predates Hemādri Paṇḍit (Thirteenth century), who quotes directly from this version of the Pāṇḍuraṅga Māhātmya in his text on *tīrtha*s.[243] It is in this Māhātmya that we find the origin story of Viṭṭhal's arrival in Paṇḍharpur, and in this tale Viṭṭhal is clearly a Vaiṣṇava deity.

Viṣṇu in the House

Similar to the distinct manifestation of Śiva enshrined in Madurai, Viṭṭhal is Viṣṇu in a specific local. However, unlike the various manifestations of Śiva in Tamil Nadu,

[241] Deleury 1960: 195.

[242] Tulpule 1979: 328-29.

[243] Dhere 2011: 18-24.

such as Sundareśvara, Arunchaleśvara, and Natarāja, who are each revered in a singular temple compound, Viṭṭhal is associated with an entire region—that of Maharashtra and northern Karnataka. Although Viṣṇu in the form of Viṭṭhal is revered throughout this broad region, he is most specifically associated with one town, Paṇḍharpur. While the average Hindu, when asked where Viṣṇu lives, will most likely point to Vaikuṇṭha, a Maharashtrian who is asked the same question regarding Viṭṭhal will say Paṇḍharpur. For even though there are many *mūrti*s of Viṭṭhal worshiped in temples and shrines all over Maharashtra and parts of northern Karnataka, in Paṇḍharpur his *mūrti* is considered a *svarūpa*, spontaneous manifestation, of Viṭṭhal. In fact, Paṇḍharpur is poetically referred to within the tradition as Bhūvaikuṇṭha, the abode of Viṣṇu on earth.[244] The Pāṇḍuraṅga Māhātmya ascribed to the Skanda Purāṇa maintains that Viṭṭhal appeared on the bank of the Bhīmā River to Puṇḍalīk, an ascetic who had neglected his parents for years, but, after a change of heart, was at that very moment engaged in deep devotional service to them. It was this gesture towards his parents that drew Viṭṭhal to Puṇḍalīk, but when he appeared, Puṇḍalīk was unable to attend to him because he was so consumed by his duties to his parents. In recognition of Viṭṭhal's presence in the soft riverbed sand, Puṇḍalīk tossed a brick to him and invited him to stand on it until he was finished with his parental devotions. Viṭṭhal, further impressed by Puṇḍalīk's commitment to honoring his parents, even in the presence of the "Lord of all," stepped onto the brick and solidified into the black stone *mūrti* that stands in the

[244] Deleury 1960: 23.

temple today. In this way, the *mūrti* is understood to be the essential form of Viṭṭhal that he himself spontaneously manifested.[245]

There is another origin story of Viṭṭhal in the Pāṇḍuraṅga Māhātmya ascribed to the Padma Purāṇa that serves to identify him as Gopāla Kṛṣṇa[246]. While this story seems to compete with the more well-known Puṇḍalīk story, the two stories can be easily reconciled, as is done in a seventeenth-century Mahātmya by Śrīdhar.[247] The story begins in Dvārakā, Kṛṣṇa's capital on the Arabian Sea in Gujarat. Here, his royal wife, Rukmiṇī, becomes angered by a visitation from Rādhā, Kṛṣṇa's adolescent lover from his cowherd days back in Vṛndāvana. Rukmiṇī storms off and Kṛṣṇa sets out to find her, accompanied by the *gopa*s, his male cowherd friends. Rukmiṇī makes her way to the area of Paṇḍharpur and hides in the Diṇḍīra Forest. Sometime later, Kṛṣṇa and the *gopa*s arrive, and while fording the Bhīmā River, Kṛṣṇa runs into and reunites with Rukmiṇī on the island now known as Viṣṇupad. This island, which is submerged during the wet season, is located just downstream from the Mahādvār Ghāṭ where Viṭṭhal appeared to Puṇḍalīk. As the name suggests, Kṛṣṇa's footprints are visibly impressed into the bedrock of the island.

The presence of Rukmiṇī by the side of Viṭṭhal in temples and shrines the length and breadth of Maharashtra speaks to this origin story, but in Paṇḍharpur itself Viṭṭhal and Rukmiṇī reside in separate shrines. Why? This story of Rukmiṇī fleeing in a jealous rage is often cited as the reason why the two are housed in separate

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[245] See Raeside 1965; Dhere 2011: 31, 140.

[246] See Dhere 2011: 32.

[247] See Raeside 1965.

shrines within the temple compound, for Rukmiṇī is understood to have arrived first and independent of Kṛṣṇa. Similar to Madurai, we have two separate shrines for the main deity and his consort. However, in the case of Paṇḍharpur, Rukmiṇī's temple is situated to the northwest of Viṭṭhal, and thus, unlike Mīnakṣī, she stands on his left side—the side of the subservient and dutiful wife. In this compound there is no question that Viṭṭhal is the primary focus and all others are secondary. This is made clear by the acceptance of his apparent mischievousness. Although the couple has reunited and apparently reconciled, the jealous tension still exists, as Rādhikā's (Rādhā's) shrine is located just a few paces away from the shrine of Rukmiṇī, who remains constantly incensed by her rival's presence. At least this is how the two head *pūjārī*s for Viṭṭhal and Rukmiṇī, respectively, presented the matter as they hosted me in the temple compound.[248] After I had taken *darśan* of Viṭṭhal and then Rukmiṇī, they made sure I visited Rādhikā (Rādhā), and although they sheepishly giggled when identifying her as Viṭṭhal's lover, at the same time they displayed a hint of pride at his apparently on going roguish playboy behavior.

Although we have two differing origin stories for Viṭṭhal in Paṇḍharpur, they need not be seen as conflicting. It is common for temple sites to have multiple origin stories, as we found with Sundareśvara in Madurai. His presence was recognized in the *svayambhū liṅga* in the forest by Indra, and yet he also came to Madurai as the bridegroom of Mīnākṣī and married into the royal family. Regarding the origin stories

[248] Personal communication with Shripad Dattatray Badave and Kaivalya Utpat, Viṭṭhal Temple, Paṇḍharpur, March 7, 2011.

of Viṭṭhal, they each serve a different purpose. While one story explains how Kṛṣṇa found himself in the Paṇḍharpur area, the other explains the means by which he stayed: by solidifying into the stone *svarūpa mūrti* standing on a brick.

The temple compound is overseen by a clan of *deśastha* brahmins by the name of Baḍvā. They are the administrators, trustees, and primary *pūjārī*s for the Viṭṭhal *mūrti*, which includes the daily ritual routine of dressing, anointing, adorning, and waving oil-lamps before the *mūrti*. For a time they claimed ownership of the temple compound, but British courts eventually ruled that Viṭṭhal himself was the sole owner and the Baḍvās were merely the hereditary caretakers.[249] There are several other *deśastha* brahmin clans that have hereditary responsibilities in the compound, such as preparing the bathwater, carrying the mace, singing hymns, and handing the oil-lamp to the Baḍvā *pūjārī* during *āratī*s. Rukmiṇī has her own clan of *pūjārī*s, the Utpāts, who are responsible for all interactions with the goddess. They are, however, answerable to the Baḍvā clan in terms of the temple compound hierarchy.[250]

Representatives from each of these clans work in unison to serve the divine couple of the compound and perform the primary rituals of the daily schedule. The ritual schedule begins each day at 3:00 am with the gentle waking of the Viṭṭhal *mūrti* by singing to him from outside the sanctum.[251] The door is then unlocked and opened. The head *pūjārī* removes the previous day's garlands, offers the *mūrti* sweet food,

[249] Gazetteer 1884: 426. On the Sanskrit literary sources for the practice of declaring the deity the legal owner of the temple, see Olivelle 2010: 200.

[250] Gazetteer 1884, v. 20, 425-427.

[251] The daily schedule witnessed in my fieldwork is reflected in the Bombay Gazetteer of 1884: vol. 20, 427-430.

and washes his feet. This is followed by the first "waving of the wick-lamb" (*kākadāratī*). Many devotees, having first bathed in the pre-dawn hours, come at this time to have their first glance of the day of their beloved Viṭṭhal by the light of the oil-lamp. When the *āratī* is finished, the *abhiśeka* (ritual bath) begins and includes the standard *pañcāmṛta*.[252] Viṭṭhal is then dressed, anointed with scented oil and sandal paste, and garlanded. A mirror is then held up by a priest for the deity to behold himself. The morning ritual is finished with the waving of another oil-lamp (*ekāratī*), which is then carried out and waved before all other *mūrti*s in the temple compound. The sanctum is now officially open for *darśan*.

The afternoon dressing (*pośākh*) of Viṭṭhal takes place at 3:00 pm. The *pūjārī* removes the sandal paste, re-anoints Viṭṭhal, and puts fresh clothes on him. He then offers the deity his afternoon meal. At 10:00 pm, the bedtime ritual (*sejāratī*) takes place. At this time the floor between the sanctum and the bedchamber is sprinkled with water and swept. The bedchamber is opened, the bed arranged, an oil-lamp lit, and some sweet milk poured into a cup for a nightcap. A red carpet is rolled out for Viṭṭhal to walk on as he retires to his bedchamber, but before this can take place the deity is undressed, anointed with fresh sandal paste, his feet bathed. Then a final lamp is waved and the door is locked for the night.

Śiva in the Mix

As mentioned earlier, in the earliest reference to the town of Paṇḍharpur found in the Kolhāpur inscription of 516 CE, the town was known as Pāṇḍaraṅgapalli, and perhaps

[252] The *pañcāmṛta* comprise five auspicious substances: curds, honey, sugar, milk, and *ghee*.

as early as 757 CE there is a Cālukya record of their king camping in the village of Bhaṇḍaraga Vittage (Pāṇḍuraṅga Viṭṭhala), which may be the earliest reference we have to the establishment of Viṭṭhal in Paṇḍharpur. With the rise of the worship of Viṭṭhal by the twelfth to thirteenth century, the early name of the town becomes synonymous with Viṭṭhal, and he is referred to in poetry as Pāṇḍuranga. Yet what is the etymology of this term Pāṇḍaraṅga, which seems to predate the arrival of Viṭṭhal? The term *pāṇḍu* in Sanskrit means "pale." Early poet-saints describe Viṭṭhal (Gopāla Kṛṣṇa) as pale in complexion, covered in the dust kicked up by the hooves of the cows he herds.[253] Yet there is another deity whose complextion is pale, to whom the term *pāṇḍu* more commonly refers: Śiva, who, after incinerating the material universe at the time of dissolution, smears the remaining white ash over his entire body. This act of Śiva's is the source of the same practice adhered to by Śaiva ascetics across India.

Pāṇḍuraṅga literally means "Town of Pāṇḍu," and a number of scholars have argued that it is likely that before the rise of the worship of Viṭṭhal, Paṇḍharpur was Śiva's town. For example, Dhere convincingly argues that the source point of Viṭṭhal's origin story, Puṇḍalīk, is none other than Śiva. He shows that the term, "Puṇḍarīk" is most likely derived from "Puṇḍarīkeśvar" ("Lord of Puṇḍarīk," or "Pale Lord"), a reference to Śiva.[254] This argument is bolstered by the presence of a temple to Puṇḍalīk at the purported spot on the riverbank where Viṭṭhal is said to

[253] Dhere 2011: 27.

[254] Dhere 2011: 142-43.

have manifested to him (see Figure 17).[255] The *mūrti* of this temple, which is itself referred to as Puṇḍalīk, is a mask-covered Śiva *liṅga* of considerable antiquity (see Figure 18). Moreover, the only festival celebrated at this temple is Mahāśivarātri, or "The Night of Śiva." This is the darkest night of the year and is traditionally celebrated as the most powerful night of the year to worship Śiva. On this night devotees flock to Śiva temples across India, where they engage in all-night chants, for it is said that Śiva's grace is magnified on this night and each repetition of his *mantra* is worth a thousand fold. Not only is the only festival celebrated by this temple a Śaiva holiday, but the attendants responsible for all ritual activities and caretaking of Puṇḍalīk are not the Vaiṣṇava Baḍvās who are in control of the Viṭṭhal Temple; they are the Koḷīs, low caste fishermen, who in this area are traditionally Śaiva.

It is not only in name and temple that Śiva is present; all over Paṇḍharpur are ancient shrines associated with Śiva. Indeed, the Viṭṭhal Temple seems to be surrounded by Śiva. The road leading from Puṇḍalīk's temple on the riverbank to the Mahādvār of the Viṭṭhal Temple is lined with several old Śiva shrines, including a Bhairava temple, which is dedicated to the fierce aspect of Śiva particularly beloved by tantric *yogin*s.

There is another shrine on this road that boasts a Vaiṣṇava veneer while obscuring Śaiva roots. Midway along the road is a Hanumān temple (see Figure 19). Written above the door and on each pillar is the phrase "*Jaya* Śrīrāma," in reference to Hanumān's role as a devoted servant of Rāma. Thus, it is a seemingly Vaiṣṇava

[255] For an image of the exposed *liṅga*, see Dhere 2011: 147.

temple given that Rāma is considered an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu. Yet the name of the temple and its architectural features point towards a different sectarian affiliation. Bold letters emblazoned across the stone façade above the entrance call out, Śrī Ākarā Rudra Mārutī Mandir. This refers to Hanumān's ancestry as one of the eleven Maruts born from Rudra, the fierce Vedic form of Śiva. Hanumān's original name is Māruti, and when referred to as such, he is directly related to Śiva. At this temple this point is driven home by the presence of the bull Nandī in the courtyard. Nandī is positioned as the *vāhana* (vehicle) of the temple, as he is in all Śiva temples—outside the door with his gaze ever focused on Śiva, as if awaiting his master's command (see Figure 20). However, at this temple, his gaze is fixed on Māruti. Given this, it could be argued that the Śrī Ākarā Rudra Mārutī Mandir is indeed a Śaiva temple that has been appropriated by the Vaiṣṇava community.[256]

As we have seen, Hanumān Māruti is also present in the temple compound of Viṭṭhal. He is situated in the middle of the large wooden *maṇḍapa* where it is he who appears to be in the position of a *vāhana*, with his gaze focused on the deity in the *garbhagṛha*. Yet Viṣṇu's typical *vāhana* is already present in the form of Garuḍa, who also stands in the *maṇḍapa* next to Māruti, directly facing his master, Viṭṭhal, situated in the *garbhagṛha*. It is possible to argue that Hanumān Māruti is indeed acting as a *vāhana* in the compound—just not for Viṭṭhal. The presence of Śiva in Paṇḍharpur does not stop at the compound walls of the Viṭṭhal Temple. In fact, he penetrates deep into the very root of the temple to the *svarūpa mūrti* of Viṭṭhal

[256] Vaudeville 1974: 142-43

himself. Śiva is present in the *garbhagṛha* by means of his *liṅga*, which Viṭṭhal carries on his head. This is the unusual protrusion issuing from Viṭṭhal's head, mentioned earlier—an aspect that is only visible when Viṭṭhal's crown is removed. This unique feature of Viṭṭhal is recognized by his devotees as a symbol of his connection to Śiva. Although Viṭṭhal is understood to be the living presence of Gopāla Kṛṣṇa, in Maharashtra he is also said to be the *guru*-brother of Śiva, in that each is the *guru* of the other. This is the explanation most often given when Vārkarīs, the largest sect of Viṭṭhal worshipers, are asked about the *liṅga* on Viṭṭhal's head.

The Vārkarīs and Lord Viṭṭhal

This blurring of sectarian lines is a common feature of the broader Maharashtrian *bhakti* movement. The Vārkarīs, who worship Viṭṭhal on a daily basies through the devotional chanting of *abhaṅga*s written in his praise by a number of Marathi poet-saints, also make an annual pilgrimage to Paṇḍharpur for Lord Viṭṭhal's *darśan*. Rather than traveling straight to the Viṭṭhal temple upon arrival in Paṇḍharpur, they first visit Puṇḍalīk in his waterside shrine. This is not because he is more important than Viṭṭhal in their eyes—quite the opposite. It is out of gratitude and respect for Puṇḍalīk as Viṭṭhal's first devotee and the reason for Viṭṭhal's manifestation in the first place. To the Vārkarīs Viṭṭhal is the absolute Godhead, and although Śiva is present, Viṭṭhal is the focal point.

The Vārkarīs trace their tradition back to their thirteenth-century founding *guru*, Jñāneśvar Mahārāj, who represents another Śaiva link through his Nāth lineage, which we will unpack more in Chapter 5. Jñāneśvar is credited with composing a

commentary on the Bhagavād Gītā in Marathi, entitled *Bhāvārtha Dīpika*, but popularly referred to as the *Jñāneśvarī*. In this way, he made the famed and sacred Sanskrit text directly available for the first time to masses of Maharashtrians. Consequently, this text became the root text of the Vārkarī movement. According to the Vārkarī tradition, Jñāneśvar is believed to have engaged in periodic pilgrimages to the Viṭṭhal Temple in Paṇḍharpur with his fellow *bhakta* Nāmdev, who continued this tradition for another fifty years after Jñāneśvar's passing.[257] Both are purported to have written large volumes of *bhajan*s, called *abhaṅga*s, in praise of their Lord Viṭṭhal. In them Viṭṭhal is celebrated as the absolute reality that has given rise to all material reality, yet he is also the one standing on a brick in the temple in Paṇḍharpur.

> The glory of the one who is without qualities has come,
> In order to be loved.
> It has assumed the form of Viṭhṭhala.[258]

The name Vārkarī comes from the word *vārī*, meaning "to go repeatedly," along with the root √*kṛ*, meaning "to make or do." Thus, a Vārkarī is "one who goes again and again," and this journey refers specifically to the pilgrimage to Paṇḍharpur for Viṭṭhal's *darśan*, while other pilgrimages are referred to as *tīrthayātra*s. The earliest inscription referring to the *vārī* dates to 1248 CE, so the tradition of going on

[257] There is conflicting evidence regarding the dates of these two figures and thus much scholarly argument as to whether or not they could have possibly met. The dating issue is discussed in chapter 5, but for our purposes here, what is of interest is the tradition's perspective regarding the purported connection between the two poet-saints. On the dating controversy, see Kiehnle 1997a: 2-6; Novetzke 2009: 42-43.

[258] Deleury 1960: 114.

the pilgrimage to Paṇḍharpur pre-dated both Jñāneśvar and Nāmdev, but through them it became a popular and cohesive tradition.[259]

The early fabric of the Vārkarī movement was made up of revered poet-saints who arose from the broad strata of the social hierarchy. Jñāneśvar, although a brahmin, was an outcaste along with his two brothers and one sister, Nivṛtti, Sopān, and Muktābāī. Nāmdev was a low-born tailor; Janābāī, a maid-servant; Chokhāmeḷā, a *mahar* (untouchable leather worker); Gorā, a potter; Cāṅgādeva and Visobā Khecara, tantric *yogin*s. From their example, neither caste nor gender was a barrier to spiritual attainment.[260] In this way, the Vārkarī movement appealed deeply to the common stock of Maharashtrians, as they could see themselves reflected in any number of their revered poet-saints and thus recognize the possibility that they too could have such a relationship with the absolute Godhead through devotion to Viṭṭhal.

After this initial burst of activity from this first generation of Vārkarī poet-saints, it seems that the movement subsided somewhat, at least in the sense of producing the caliber of revered poet-saints such as those just discussed. This changed in the sixteenth century with the work of Eknāth, a highly educated and respected brahmin from Paiṭhaṇ, the seat of brahmin authority in the Maharashtrian region.[261] In alignment with the open and nonsectarian perspective of the early Vārkarī poet-saints, Eknāth's *paramparā* (*guru*-lineage) has ties to the Maharashtrian

[259] Tulpule 1979: 328, n. 99.

[260] On the social makeup of the early Vārkarīs, see Tulpule 1979: 329-338; Ranade 2003: 198-208; Zelliot: 1995.

[261] Tulpule 1979: 352-64; Ranade 2003: 213-58. For an extensive consideration of Eknāth, see Keune 2011.

Sufi tradition, although it is doubtful that this cross-traditional link was broadly known until twentieth-century scholarship revealed it.[262] Nonetheless, it speaks to the depth of egalitarian understanding embraced by the core founders and custodians of the tradition. In many ways, Eknāth is responsible for revitalizing the movement. In addition to his own *abhaṅgas* in praise of Viṭṭhal and his commentarial work on the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, he is also credited with editing Jñāneśvar's famed Gītā commentary and revitalizing the pilgrimage tradition to Paṇḍharpur, as well as to the sacred town of Āḷandī associated with the life and death of Jñāneśvar.

From Eknāth forward to this day, the Vārkarī tradition has remained the backbone of Maharashtrian *bhakti*. In terms of its revered figures, following Eknāth comes the seventeenth-century master poet of the tradition, Tukārām of Dehu. Not only did he demonstrate his unbridled devotion to Viṭṭhal through his vast opus of *abhaṅga*s, but he also sang of the earlier poet-saints' dedication to Viṭṭhal as well, further broadening their appeal to the Maharashtrian population.

Although these figures form the main thread of the tradition, there appear to be countless lesser known, but locally revered, poet-saints from all periods of the movement, forming a dense fabric of devotional culture in the Maharashtrian psyche. The Maharashtrian *bhakti* tradition is an anchor of Maharashtrian identity, and this lineage of poet-saints is broadly beloved, yet the distinction of being a Vārkarī is reserved for those who make the *vārī*. Although the movement is open to anyone,

[262] Tulpule 1979: 353.

regardless of caste or gender, its appeal has traditionally been to laborers, merchants, and agriculturalists of rural Maharashtra.

In addition to making the annual pilgrimage, the Vārkarī must adhere to a set of vows, which include being a strict vegetarian, wearing a *tulsi-māla*,[263] and an active engagement in recognizing equality among all beings in relation to the absolute Godhead.[264] This reflects the tradition's nondual stance, as Viṭṭhal is revered as the beloved source of all, the absolute that has given birth to all of material reality. In this regard he is often referred to with the femenized for of his name, Viṭhābāī Māulī, Mother Viṭṭhal, and for the vast number of Vārkarīs throughout Maharashtra, that formless Mother is standing on a brick inside the Viṭṭhal Temple in Paṇḍharpur.[265]

Thus, we find that in Paṇḍharpur Viṣṇu manifests as the mythico-historical personality of place known as Viṭṭhal. Although the tradition recognizes Viṭṭhal as Gopāla Kṛṣṇa, the stories associated with Kṛṣṇa's life are not foregrounded in the Viṭṭhal cult. Instead, what is privileged are stories of his interaction with his Maharashtrian devotees captured in the vast corpus of *abhaṅga*s composed by the most revered poet-saints of the Vārkarī tradition. Through these stories Viṭṭhal's direct and personal relationship with a number of the poet-saints is revealed. With Jñāneśvar and Nāmdev, Viṭṭhal has several candid and passionate conversations about their devotion and attainment. With Janābāī, he sits all day beside her turning her mill-wheel while she loses herself in devotional singing to him. With Chokhāmeḷā,

[263] A necklace made from tulsi wood, a plant associated with Kṛṣṇa worship.
[264] On Vārkarī vows, see Deleury 1960: 2-6.
[265] Dhere 2011: 207-220.

who was barred from entering Viṭṭhal's temple due to his untouchable status, the Lord instead comes to him and sits in his low-born house, to the astonishment of the elite and condescending temple brahmins. In this way, we see that the distinct personality of Viṭṭhal is the driving force that shapes the relationship with the living presence of Viṣṇu in Paṇḍharpur.

PART II

Samādhi Shrines

CHAPTER 4
The Practice of *Samādhi* Burial

In Hindu traditions, a *satguru* is one who, through lifetimes of arduous spiritual practice, has become permanently established in the absolute, which is framed in the *bhakti* traditions as a state of union with a personal God. People are drawn to such beings to receive their blessings in both spiritual and material endeavors. As such, a community often forms around the realized *satguru*, which in some cases functions in an institutional structure known as an *āśrama*, with a daily schedule of service and a kitchen for feeding the needy as well as guests. It is customary in Hindu traditions to bring a gift or offering to the *guru* out of gratitude for his blessings. These offerings are often redistributed to the community in the form of *prasād*, the remnants of the offerings that are infused with the blessings and power of the one who now gives it—the *guru*. When death comes to such a realized *guru*, his perfected body is generally buried rather than cremated, and a shrine is built over the tomb.[266] The *āśrama* may continue to function in the same manner as when the *guru* was alive, with an

[266] Some ascetic traditions immersed the deceased body of the *guru* in water, a practice known as *jalasamādhi* (water-burial). See Kane 1974: 938-942; Pandey 1969: 256-57.

additional regimen of worship and gift offerings focused on the *samādhi* shrine of the deceased *guru*.

There are some immediate questions that need to be addressed when considering the Hindu *samādhi* shrine. Why is the body buried instead of cremated, which is the standard Hindu practice for most people at death? How far back can we trace this tradition? Why build a shrine? Why is worship directed toward the being sitting in the tomb? Is the realized *guru* the focal point of this worship, or is he an intermediary with the divine on behalf of his devotees? These questions will drive our investigation into the Hindu *samādhi* shrine tradition.

Jñāneśvar's *samādhi* shrine traditionally dates from the late thirteenth century, and it is also from this period forward that many of the datable Hindu *samādhi* sites were established. Around the same time, beginning in the twelfth century and increasing in the thirteenth, the Sufi *dargāh* (tomb-shrine) tradition exploded across India, as Sufi lineages spilled into the Indian subcontinent during the push east away from Mongol-invaded Iran and Afghanistan in the thirteenth century. This interesting timing has led many scholars to speculate whether the tradition of burying the body of the realized Hindu *guru* and marking the spot with a shrine was borrowed from the popular Muslim tomb-shrine tradition that was spreading across the subcontinent. Hans Bakker's comments are typical of such speculation. In a 2007 article he notes, "How to explain that we have no archaeological evidence of this sort of ancient monuments of yogins, whereas we have innumerable ones of Buddhist saints? . . . The situation appears significantly altered in the later (post AD 1200) period, in

which we find *samādhi*s, chiefly of yogins and saints. . . . This change may be partly due to Islamic influence."[267] I agree with these scholars that these two tomb-shrine traditions—the Sufi *dargāh* tradition and the Hindu *samādhi* shrine tradition—have much in common and have no doubt mutually influenced each other over the years. In fact, the Sufi *dargāh* may very well have contributed in a significant way to the development of the tradition of *samādhi* shrine worship, as we will see in the subsequent chapter. However, in this chapter I will argue that the Hindu *samādhi* burial tradition not only has pre-*dargāh* roots in India and thus arose independently of the Sufi tomb-shrine tradition, but it did so far earlier. In the final chapter, I will argue that it is the ontological ground on which the realized Hindu *guru* rests that allows for certain *samādhi* shrines, such as Jñāneśvar's, to be treated as if they are temples housing the very presence of the divine.

The Act of Taking *Samādhi*

Since as early as the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa (ca. eighth century BCE), there exists in the Vedic tradition the notion that each living being is connected to the sun by means of a *raśmi* (ray or rein) attached to the center of the heart.[268] The sun is understood to be the barrier between the mortal world and the immortal realm beyond, which is termed *brahmaloka* in the Upaniṣads—the world of Brahman, the undifferentiated absolute.

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[267] Bakker 2007: 35, n79.

[268] Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa 10.5.2.8, 13. Cited in White 2009: 128; 281, n. 36, where White is himself citing Malamoud.

Thus, the way to attain this absolute reality was through the sun. The Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad says:

> But those in the wilderness, calm and wise, who live a life of penance and faith, as they beg their food; Through the sun's door they go, spotless, to where that immortal Person is, that immutable self.[269]

It is in one of the earliest Upaniṣads, the Chāndogya Upaniṣad (ca. seventh-sixth centuries BCE), that we first find a clear description of the process by which one can permanently attain this absolute reality, never to return again—a process that is designated by certain contemporary Hindu tradisitons by the term *mahāsamādhi* (great absorption).

> [W]hen he is departing from this body, he rises up (*utkrāmati*) along those same rays. He goes up with the sound "OṂ." No sooner does he think of it than he reaches the sun. It is the door to the further world, open to those who have the knowledge but closed to those who do not. In this connection, there is this verse: "One hundred and one, the channels of the heart. One of them runs up to the crown of the head. Going up by it, he reaches the immortal. The rest, in their ascent, spread out in all directions."[270]

A similar process is described in chapter 8 of the Bhagavad Gītā, in which Kṛṣṇa instructs Arjuna in the proper way to attain the immortal realm upon leaving the body at death.

> At the hour of death, with unmoving mind, and yoked to devotion by the power of yoga, having made the vital breath enter between the eyebrows, he reaches this divine supreme spirit.

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[269] Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad 1.2.11. Translations of all Upaniṣads are taken from Olivelle 2008, unless otherwise noted.

[270] Chāndogya Upaniṣad 8.6.5-6.

> That which those who know the Vedas call the imperishable, which the ascetics, free from passion, enter, desiring which they follow a life of chastity, that path I shall explain to you briefly.
>
> Closing all the gates to the body, and confining the mind in the heart, having placed the vital breath in the head, established in yoga concentration,
>
> Uttering the single-syllable "Om"—Brahman—meditating on Me, he who goes forth, renouncing the body, goes to the supreme goal.[271]

We can compare these textual instructions with a twentieth-century eyewitness description of the passing of a renowned adept by his main disciple. If we compare the contemporary Hindu teacher Swami Muktananda's eyewitness account of Bhagawan Nityananda's *mahāsamādhi* formulations, we can recognize significant resonances among the formulations.

> Dr. Nicholson was gently rubbing Shree Gurudev's palms, and I was gently rubbing his feet. The flow of *prāṇa* left the feet. The doctor let go of his hands. The time of great liberation had come. The *prāṇa* was rising upward. I caught hold of Shree Gurudev's hands.
>
> His face took on the same appearance that we had seen in the early days—the *shāmbhavī mudrā*, an outward gaze with an inward focus. He cast a loving look, full of grace, at the devotees on all sides, and then turned his eyes upward. The *sashumnā nādī* throbbed between his eyebrows. The sound *Om*, beautiful and melodious, was heard, and his life-breath, his *prāṇa*, merged with the cosmic Consciousness.[272]

Like the temple tradition, the yogic tradition draws from a centuries-old concept of ascension that permeates all the major schools of Indian thought and traces its roots back to early Vedic concepts of "warrior apotheosis," to use David White's

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[271] Bhagavad Gītā 8.10-13. All translations of the Bhagavad Gītā are from Sargeant 1994, unless otherwise noted.

[272] Muktananda 1996: 57.

term. As White has elaborated, the earliest accounts of the term "*yoga*" are related to matters concerning the warrior and his chariot. *Yoga* in this context carries with it the notion of being ready for battle, as in the warrior being "hitched to his rig." In this regard it can also mean "ready for the journey or task at hand." This is no more important than at the time of death, for at this moment the warrior has an opportunity to attain the immortal world of the gods. The sun god Āditya, who stands between the immortal realm and the earth, is held to ensure not only the death of beings in the mortal realm but their transition to the world of the ancestors (*pitṛloka*), and it is he who blocks their entrance to the immortal world of the gods. However, a skilled warrior who at the time of death becomes yoked to *yoga* (*yogayukta*) can mount an assault on the sun in an attempt to pierce it and pass through to the immortal realm. This is done by taking hold of the rays, or reins, of the sun (*raśmi*s) and charging up them in his war chariot.[273]

As the term *yoga* is appropriated by the early ascetics of the Upaniṣadic revolution, this concept of the ascending warrior is internalized in the very body of the *yogin*, where the process of ascension is understood to occur along a central channel running from the heart up through the crown of the head to the sun beyond. Along this channel are situated various points of concentration such as the heart. The *yogin*, by means of drawing his senses inward and focusing his breath on this central channel, is equipped to mount his own assault in an attempt to pierce the sun and enter the immortal realm. Over the next millennium, through the Upaniṣadic, epic,

[273] White 2009: 59-71.

and tantric periods, this ascension-body model is progressively developed. During the tantric era (fourth-twelfth century CE) this internal structure of a vertical column with subtle energy centers along it becomes highly developed in a variety of ways. It is at this time that the classic six-*cakra* system is developed, although it is not the only internal structure present in these texts.[274]

By this time, in the Śaiva tradition, we have the emergence of *kuṇḍalinī* as the indwelling goddess, Śakti. Although she is the power that animates the living being, she lies dormant as if in slumber at the base of the spine. When she awakens, either through yogic practice or initiation by a *satguru*, true guru, she rises along the *suṣumṇā* (central column), piercing all the subtle centers (*cakra*s or *granthi*s), and merges at or above the crown of the head, establishing the *yogin* in the state of liberation (*mokṣa*).[275] His consciousness then operates at this pivot point between manifest reality and the unmanifest absolute beyond. [276] From this vantage, a yogic

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[274] The earliest scriptural account of the *ṣaḍcakra* system is the *Kaulajñānanirnāya* (ninth-tenth cen. CE) of Matsyendranātha. The *Jayadrathayāmala Tantra* and *Netra Tantra*, whose dates may be earlier than the *Kaulajñānanirnāya*, also discuss six *cakra* systems though their dates cannot be determined wth any accuracy (personal communication with David Gordon White). For a detailed discussion of the earliest textual accounts of the six *cakra*s and *haṭha-yoga* practice, see White 1996: 73; 134-35; 422-23, ns. 83-92. On the various subtle body systems, see Silburn 1988; Brunner 1994: 425-61; Heilijger-Seelens 1994; Avalon 1950.

[275] Yet, as Silburn has shown, the Kuṇḍalinī of the Kashmiri traditions espouses a five-cakra system in which the cakras are understood as wheels that spin upon piercing. They are not rendered as lotuses, which is the norm for the Kuṇḍalinī systems. See Silburn 1988: 25-26.

[276] The control of material reality comes from the mastering of the *tattvas*. This term refers to the classic Sāṃkhyan categorization of 25 descending levels of reality from the eternal unmanifest realm progressively down into material manifestation. See for example, Larson 1987.

master is able to leave his body at will to merge with the absolute, a process called *utkrānti* (literally, "stepping up").[277]

While in these early texts the term *samādhi* is not directly applied to the process of attaining the immortal realm when shedding the body at the time of death, it is indirectly applied to this process through the combination of certain terms, which we will now consider. As White has shown, the terms most commonly associated with descriptions of ascension to the immortal realm are those derived from the verbal root √*kram*, "to step," often in conjunction with the compound *yogayukta*, "yoked to *yoga*." As noted earlier, the sun god Āditya, who stands between the immortal realm and the earth, is ascribed the role of ensuring the transition of the dead to the world of the ancestors (*pitṛloka*) and of blocking their entrance to the immortal world of the gods.[278] During the Vedic period the *yajamāna*, in the course of the Vedic sacrifice, made ascents to the sun and back on his *prāṇa* by means of a *mantra* body constructed for him by Vedic priests. The term used for this daily ascent created by the sacrifice was *saṃkramaṇa* (*sam*-√*kram*).[279] This term, translated as "transference," is retained in the Buddhist context to refer to what the Buddhists call "consciousness transference to a higher realm."[280] It is also used to describe Kṛṣṇa's

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[277] Fitzgerald 2006: 185-212. Two important tantric texts, the Mālinīvijayottaratantra (ninth century CE) and the Kubjikāmatatantra (eleventh century CE), provide the most extensive discussions of *utkranti*, or "stepping up," by means of which the *yogin* travels up his rising *prāṇa*, forcibly pierces all the subtle centers, and erupts through the crown of the head to enter the immortal realm, never to return again.

[278] White 2009: 62.

[279] White 2009: 67.

[280] Mullin 2006: 67.

transition to his cosmic abode after dropping the body towards the end of the Mahābhārata.[281]

While in the Vedic context, the *yajamāna* made periodic ascents to the heavenly realm guarded by Āditya, he always remained tethered to the earthly realm by the presence of his wife (*patnī*) at the domestic fire (*gārhapatya*) in the sacrificial field where the ritual was taking place. In this way, he assured his return to the earthly plane at the sacrifice's end. However, the scriptures state that there are two types of beings who are able to pierce the orb of the sun and enter the immortal realm for good: the *parivrājaka*, wandering ascetic, and the *yogayukta*, one who is "yoked to *yoga*" at the time of death while facing battle.[282] In the compound *yogayukta*, *yukta* is the past passive participle of the verbal root √*yuj* and in this context simply means "yoked" or "joined." The term *yoga* in this compound, which is derived from the same root √*yuj*, is a bit more difficult to pin down, as we shall see, and so for now we will gloss the term *yogayukta* as simply "yoked to *yoga*."

Thanks to White's textual excavations, we are aware of several accounts in the Mahābhārata (ca. 200 BCE-100 CE) of such beings piercing the orb of the sun at the moment of death. According to White, four of these accounts are concerned with warriors dying in battle (*yogayukta*s), and three are concerned with hermits

[281] Mahābhārata 16.5.18-25.

[282] White 2009: 33, n. 137; 60.

(*parivrājaka*s).[283] In all these cases, the dying being advances upward (*ut-√kram*) to the immortal realm after making himself *yogayukta*. In these early accounts, White argues, the term *yoga* must be understood in the sense of "join" or "connect," which is one of the two definitions ascribed by the famed Sanskrit grammarian Pāṇini, to the root *√yuj*, from which we get the term *yoga* as well as *yukta*. As such, White asserts that this compound must be understood as "hitched to his rig," as in a chariot. However, I would argue that this joining or hitching to one's chariot may well have been achieved by utilizing the very experience of *samādhi* as the tool of yoking. The other definition Pāṇini ascribes to the root *√yuj* is *samādhi*—one that White shies away from, arguing that it is based on a Yoga-Sūtras' (ca. 350-450 CE) interpretation of *yoga* that becomes projected backward onto all previous uses of the term.[284] While his warning is sound, and we would be wise to follow his lead when looking at uses of *yoga* in early Vedic literature, we should not forget that the definition of *√yuj* as *samādhi* pre-dates the Yoga-Sūtras by some seven hundred years, as Pāṇini is dated to the fourth century BCE.

In Pāṇini's first definition of the root *√yuj*, the term means "yoke" or "join together." This practice of "yoking" or "joining together" on a subtle level gives rise to the second definition of *√yuj*, which refers to the practice of the mind yoking itself to an object in meditation to the point of complete identification with that object—a

[283] Bhūriśravas 7.118.16-19; Droṇa 7.165.39-42; Jaigīṣavya 9.49.1-62; Śuka 12.319.5b-24b; unnamed brahmin 12.350.8-351.1; Bhīṣma 13.154.2-6; Kṛṣṇa 16.5.18-25; Yudiṣṭhira 17.1.28, 17.1.44-17.2.3: See White 2009: 67-71.
[284] On Pāṇini's definition of *√yuj*, see Larson 2008: 28.

practice that Pāṇini terms *samādhi*. This practice results in the stilling of the mind. This is the definition of *yoga* found in the Kāṭha Upaniṣad (ca. third-first Century BCE).

> When the five perceptions are stilled, together with the mind,
> And not even reason bestirs itself; they call it the highest state.
>
> When senses are firmly reined in, that is Yoga, so people think
> From distractions a man is then free, for Yoga is the coming-into-being, as well as ceasing-to-be.[285]

It is also the definition found in the Yoga-Sūtras, which asserts, "*Yoga* is the cessation of all mental fluctuation."[286] In these two texts that bookend the composition of the Mahābhārata, *yoga* is defined along the line of Pāṇini's second definition of √*yuj* as *samādhi*.

Although most of the examples in the Mahābhārata of warriors dying on the battlefield and ascending to the immortal realm are filled with imagery and terminology harking back to earlier Vedic images of warrior apotheosis, the process seems to be an internal one. I would argue that by the time of the Mahābhārata, the notion of *yoga* is much more aligned with the Kaṭha Upaniṣad and the later Yoga-Sūtras' understanding of *yoga* as *samādhi*, and this can be recognized by the very practices in which these *yogayukta*s are engaged at the time of their apotheoses. Sitting down, forcing together the breaths and the senses, the warrior/ascetic yokes himself to *yoga*, and with eyes focused on the goal (eyes turning upward), hitched to his *prāṇa* (his subtle chariot), he ascends along the central channel (*raśmi*) to pierce

[285] Kāṭha Upaniṣad 6.10-11.

[286] "*yogaścittavṛttinirodhaḥ*." Yoga-Sūtras 1.2.

the sun (crown of the head) and attain *brahmaloka*, never to return again. These vivid descriptions of the practices of the *yogayukta*s challenge us to reconsider the meaning of *yoga* in this context.[287] These practices are not only the manner in which one yokes oneself to *yoga*; they are the very act of *yoga* itself—*yoga* as *samādhi*.

Both Vyāsa, in his fifth-century commentary on the Yoga-Sūtras, and Vācaspati Miśra, in his tenth-century commentary, gloss the Yoga-Sūtras' definition of *yoga* as *samādhi*. In this context, *samādhi*, the state of ultimate absorption in the absolute, is attained by "putting" or "placing together" (*sam-ā-√dhā*) the senses and breaths, which still the mind to the point of ceasing all mental flux. It is thus possible to gloss *yogayukta* as "yoked to *samādhi*." From this, we can begin to understand the path towards the eventual labeling of such apotheoses as "taking *samādhi*." According to the Mahābhārata, when Kṛṣṇa decided that the time had come to leave the body, he forced together his senses, speech, and mind and reached *mahāyoga*—a term that we may perhaps interpret as comparable in meaning to the later term *mahāsamādhi*.[288] Although this term, *mahāsamādhi*, would not be applied to this practice until several centuries later, I would argue that the constallation of practices was already in place by the time of the epic.

By the time of the major tantric Śaiva Āgamas (eighth-eleventh centuries CE), we find that the term *utkrānti*, which had been associated with the act of passing away

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[287] For White's arguments against *yoga* as *samādhi* in pre-Yoga-Sūtras uses, see White 2009: 59-73.

[288] Mahābhārata 16.5.18-25.

since as early as the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa, is now directly applied to the notion of voluntarily exiting the body at the time of death in order to enter the immortal realm.[289] There are several texts that give instructions on how to perform *utkrānti*.[290] They are also careful to note who is eligible, and under what circumstances, to participate in such an endeavor. *Utkrānti* is discussed most extemsively in the Mālinīvijayottara Tantra and the Kubjikāmata Tantra. In his commentary on the Mālinīvijayottara Tantra in his Tantrāloka, Abhinavagupta (tenth century CE) points to the apotheosis of Bhīṣma in the Mahābhārata as the example par excellence of *utkrānti*. Building on the model first found in the Chāndogya Upaniṣad, these Śaiva Tantras construct a far more complex and detailed exercise that includes, but is not limited to, the use of specific *mantra*s to sever all connections that the *prāṇa* has with the body as it ascends in stages from *cakra to cakra* up the *suṣumnā*, resulting in a permanent departure from the body.[291] Worth noting here is the instruction that, after filling the body with air, "Then, translocating the [vital energy] one should lead it

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[289] White 2009: 120.

[290] Mālinīvijayottara Tantra 17.25-32; Kubjikāmata Tantra 23.97-148; *Tantrāloka* 14.39b; According to Sanderson, other Śaiva *tantra* sources that discuss *utkrānti* include Skanda Purāṇa 182.973-977; Niśvāsakārikā Paṭala 33; Sārdhatriśatikālottara 11.13-19b; Bṛhatkālottara Utkrāntyantyeṣṭipaṭala vv.1-7; Mataṅgapārameśvarāgama, Caryāpāda 9; Picumata, Paṭalas 5 and 100; *Tantrāloka* 28.292-302; Jñānasiddhānta; Goudriaan lists Netrajñānārṇva 55.191a; Tantrarāja 27, 75f (see Goudriaan 1983: 112, n. 10). Sanderson also notes that the Paśupata tradition used the term *niṣṭhā* (completion) rather than *utkrānti* (see Sanderson 2006: 207), and Gonda notes that the Kiraṇāgama refers to it as *kalokrānti* (see Gonda 1977: 188).

[291] Regarding Mālinīvijayottara Tantra, see Vasudeva 2004: 437-445. Regarding Kubjikāmata Tantra, see Goudriaan 1983: 92-117.

from the big toe to the cranial aperture."[292] One is immediately reminded here of Swami Muktananda's description of feeling the flow of *prāṇa* leaving his *guru*'s feet and rising upward through the body just prior to Nityananda's final ascension.[293]

Although *utkrānti* continues to be the standard term for this practice in medieval Śaiva literature, by the seventh century we have evidence of the term *samādhi* being utilized by Jain ascetics to describe the final practice of leaving the body by one who has taken the vow of *sallekhanā* (death by starvation). In his investigation of material remains at the Karnataka site of Śravaṇa Beḷgoḷa, S. Settar identifies inscriptions from burial markers that use the term *samādhi* to describe the process by which at least fifteen individuals took "voluntary death through meditation," five of them dating from the seventh century.[294] At least one of these seventh-century markers, that of a female ascetic, is accompanied by a sculptural relief referred to as "Demati's *samādhi*," in which is depicted the ascetic's engagement in the practice of *samādhi-maraṇa* (death through meditation).[295]

By the thirteenth century we begin to see examples of the term *samādhi* being used in various Hindu traditions to refer to the same process. The Yoga-Yājñavalkya (ca. thirteenth-fourteenth century CE) states that one pierces the sun by means of *samādhi*.[296] The *Tirumantiram* of Tamil Śaiva Tirumūlar (twelfth century CE) speaks

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[292] Excerpt from Mālinīvijayottara Tantra 17.25-28, cited in Vasudeva 2004: 439.

[293] Muktananda 1996: 57.

[294] Settar 1989: 115-118.

[295] Settar 1989: 118, fig. 26; pl. xxvii.

[296] Yoga-Yājñavalkya Adhyāya 10.

of "the *samādhi* called the path to the perfect cave" with reference to the act of the *siddha* leaving his body at death, and the section dealing with the proper rituals to be performed for his body is entitled, "*Samādhi* Rituals."[297] Around this same time, we have Nāmdev's three-part biography of Jñāneśvar, the third part of which relates Nāmdev's eyewitness account of Jñāneśvar giving up the body. The title of this section of the biography is simply "*Samādhi*."[298]

Although he does not use the term *utkrānti* or *samādhi*, Jñāneśvar himself, in his commentary on Kṛṣṇa's instructions to Arjuna in the Bhagavad Gītā concerning the matter of giving up the body,[299] speaks in detail of the process of attaining Brahman at the time of death.

> Sitting in the lotus posture, facing north and holding in his heart the joy of the yoga of action,
>
> With a concentrated mind filled with love for Self-realization, and eagerly reaching out to attain it,
>
> With his practice of yoga completed, his life force rises from the *muladhara cakra* at the base of the spine through the *suṣumna nadi* towards the *sahasrara* at the crown of the head.
>
> Though outwardly it appears that the *prāṇa* has become one with the mind, in fact it enters the head.
>
> When it enters the space between the eyebrows it destroys both active and lifeless matter, just as the sound dies away inside a bell.

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[297] *Tirumantiram* 7.18-19. The composition of the *Tirumantiram* is credited to XXX of the Tamil Śiva tradition and may have conncetions to the Nāth tradition, of which Jñāneśvar belongs, under the name Mūlanāth. See White 1996: 87. All translations from the *Tirumantiram* are by Natarajan unless otherwise noted.

[298] Nāmdeva Gāthā 872-1096.

[299] Bhagavad Gītā 8.10-13.

O Arjuna, the dying man may leave his body like a lamp that has been covered so that no one can tell when and how it was extinguished.

Such a man is the pure supreme Self. He is called the highest, and he reaches My eternal abode.[300]

Fix your mind in the innermost cave of your heart, and curb its tendency to run after outer objects.

This is possible only when the gateways of the senses are firmly closed by the doors of restraint.

Then the mind is easily confined and remains silent in the heart, just as a person with his arms and legs broken cannot leave his house.

O Arjuna, when the attention is fixed in this way, the life force should be transmuted into the sacred syllable and brought up through the *suṣumnā* to the space between the eyebrows.

As soon as it reaches this center, it should be held there with firm resolution, until the three components of the sacred syllable, merge together in the crown center.

Until then the life force should be held still in the space between the eyebrows. After its union with the sacred syllable, it begins to rejoice in the half syllable at the end.[301]

Then all memory ceases, and with it the life force is lost. Beyond that only the Eternal remains.

Therefore, he who remembers the one name, the sacred syllable of the Absolute which is My highest form,

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[300] *Jñāneśvarī* 8.91-97. All translations from *Jñāneśvarī* are taken from Kripananda 1989, unless otherwise noted. In verse 8.94, Kripananda uses the Sanskrit terms *mūlādhāra*, *suṣumṇā*, and *sahasrāra*, in her translation, as these are the common terms for the root *cakra*, central *nāḍī*, and the crown of the head. These terms are associated with the *ṣaṭcakra* system as employed by the author of the *ṣaṭcakra nirūpaṇa*, a sixteenth century text that becomes the standard in yogic body mapping, and thus, these terms are recognizable to most students of yoga. The actual terms used by Jñāneśvar are *āgnisthān*, *madhyamārga*, and *brahmarandrā*, respectively.

[301] This may be a reference to the *anusvāra* on the syllable Om.

> And who leaves his body in this way, most certainly comes to Me. There is no higher goal than this.[302]

The Practice of Burying the Body

Just as the very process by which a realized sage leaves his body at death is established early on, so too is the practice of caring for the body. As early as the Taittirīya Āraṇyaka (eighth-sixth century BCE) there is mention of the practice of burying the body of the sage who has attained *brahmaloka*, and Kane notes, "A *yati* (*Sannyāsin*) was and is even now buried."[303] The Dharma Sūtras also discuss the disposal procedures for the bodies of the four different types of ascetics: the *kuṭīcaka* is cremated,[304] the *bahūdaka* is buried, the *haṃsa* is submerged in water, and the *paramahaṃsa* is thoroughly buried.[305] It is the *paramahaṃsa* that we are concerned with here, as he is "an ascetic of the highest order, a religious man who has subdued

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[302] *Jñāneśvarī* 8.109-117.

[303] Taittirīya Āraṇyaka 3; Kane 1973: 229.

[304] Presumably because he is still connected to his fires or the fires of his son, in whose house he resides. See Kane 1974: 938-942.

[305] These four types of ascetics are hierarchically ordered from the *kuṭīcaka* up to the *paramahaṃs,* each one pergressively more austere in their commitment. A *kuṭīcaka* is a religious mendicate who still lives in his own house or his son's and begs food from his son. A *bahūdaka* has given up his home and begs food "at seven houses of sage-like brāhmaṇas or well-conducted men." The *haṃsa* never stay for more than one night in any given place and thus are always on the move. The *paramahaṃsa* sleep under trees, in abandoned houses or in burial grounds, wear minimal clothing or go naked. Regarding the desposal procedures for the bodies of these ascetic types detailed in the Dharma Sūtras, I have no idea of what "thoroughly buried" means. The diference between the burials of the *bahūdaka* and the *paramahaṃsa* are not made clear in the text. See Kane 1974: 938-942; Pandey 1969: 256-57.

all his senses by abstract meditation."[306] He is generally represented as a realized sage who has attained Brahman.

In the Baudhāyana Pitṛmedhasūtra, a text dated to the sixth-third centuries BCE, we find detailed descriptions of the burial process for the *parivrājaka* who has pierced the orb of the sun and entered the immortal realm, including the size of the pit, the implements to be buried with the body, and the *mantra*s to be recited.

> One should go to the east or the north of the village, he should dig a sacrificial pit as deep as the staff (carried by the *yati*) under a palāśa tree or on a river bank or on some other pure spot to the accompaniment of the *vyāhṛtis*; then he should sprinkle water thereon thrice repeating the seven *vyāhṛtis* each time, should spread darbha grass on the bottom of the pit, should deck the body (with garlands, sandal paste), deposit the body in the pit. . . . He should place in the right hand the staff of the *parivrājaka* (breaking it three times . . .). He places the *śikya* (loop of strings) in the left hand with the *mantra* 'what is beyond this world', the piece of cloth used as a water-strainer on the mouth with the words 'by which strainer the gods', the pot on his belly with the Gāyatrī stanza, his pot near his private parts with the *mantra* 'earth went to earth'.[307]

The *Yatidharmasamuccaya* (eleventh century CE) quotes similar sections found in the Atri and Śaunaka Dharma Śāstras (fifth-tenth century CE). In a manual of last rites for Lakulīśa Pāśupatas, similar recommendations have also been found for the ascetic who has become identified as Śiva.[308]

Furthermore, there are no purification regulations observed in relation to the death and burial of a *parivrājaka* because it is believed that no impurity is incurred by

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[306] Monier Williams 588.2.

[307] Baudhāyana Pitṛmedhasūtra 3.11, cited in Kane 1974: 229-30.

[308] Acharya 2010: 151-52.

his relatives or by those who have touched his corpse.[309] This is a radical concept, as the impurity generally associated with death in Hindu traditions is totalizing, as Pandey makes clear:

> A corpse is everywhere regarded as taboo and the greatest care is taken in approaching or dealing with it. . . . Whatsoever may be the religious or sentimental motive underlying the taboo, one thing is evident that, to a great extent, it was based on the contagious nature of the corpse. So the survivors, owing to their contact with the dead person during his sickness and with his corpse after his death, are severed from the society on the sanitary grounds. The prohibitions consequent on a death, however, reach far beyond the persons who have been compelled to perform the last offices about the corpse. They extend to the whole house, the whole family, the whole clan, the whole village, nay, the very fields and even sometimes to the heavens.[310]

Given the stringent prohibitions associated with corpses, it is striking that the bodies of *paravrājaka*s are not subject to such taboos. One who prepares the body of a *parivrājaka* for burial or digs the grave not only remains untainted but is held to receive blessings on par with those of the horse sacrifice, a Vedic ritual reserved for a king that bestows immense merit. Neither is the *sapiṇḍīkaraṇa* ritual performed, since the realized sage who has attained Brahman is liberated from the cycle of birth and death altogether.[311]

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[309] See Olivelle 1995: 176-80.

[310] Pandey 1969: 256-57.

[311] *Sapiṇḍīkaraṇa* is a practice of offering rice balls to the deceased over a period of twelve days. From these rice balls (*piṇḍa*s), a new body (also called *piṇḍa*) is created for the diseased, in which it will make the year-long journey to *pitṛloka*, the realm of the ancestors. After this journey the *preta* (ghost) becomes a *pitṛ* (ancestor). After an extended period of time in *pitṛloka*, as much as six generations, the *pitṛ* will fall back to the earthly realm in the form of rain and take on a new body and new life. This is the cycle from which the one who has attained Brahman is freed and in which he no

By the thirteenth century the practice of the realized sage leaving the body and the place of internment of the body are both referred to by the term *samādhi*, as is evident from the *Tirumantiram*'s two chapters dedicated to taking *samādhi* and the rituals for burying the body, which are entitled, respectively, "Accomplished *Samādhi* in the Cave of the Heart" and "*Samādhi* Rituals." Following is an extended passage dealing with the burial rituals:

> Make a clean depth of nine long spans
> Surrounding the mass make a breadth of five spans
> Prepare the cell of penance with a triangle of three spans each
> Place the body in lotus posture in the cell that defies birth.
>
> [On] plot, road, the tank bund, space amidst rivers
> Beautiful flower garden, a space in the town
> The imponderable forest, the steep mountain slopes
> These are sites worthy of making cells.
>
> The good cell is on four sides five foot-steps breadth
> The standing height is nine feet being straight
> The elegant cross length is three by three
> It is fitting those who are close, to do.
>
> It is done by stretching five metals and gems nine
> By pressing them hard and placing the pedestal over it and
> By spreading the *muñci* grass and putting the white holy ash over it
> And by stuffing the golden turmeric powder too.
>
> Make four squares in the center of the cell and over it
> Place the honey secreting flower garland, sandal paste, the perfume of
> Musk and pure sandal, civet perfume mixed with rose water and
> Show bright light with delight.
>
> Smear over the body the praised white ash as coat
> Keep it on the pedestal and
> Embellish it with flowers, grass, powder and ash, and

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longer partakes. Instead, he is absorbed into the totality and unity that is Brahman. See Knipe 1977: 111-24; Olivelle 1995: 176-180.

Spread them over the pedestal.

After spreading these, pave it on all four sides
Place on the tender shoot, fried vegetables, cooked rice and tender coconuts
After obtaining the kind countenance and look
Place the ceremonial cloth on the body.

Pour white ash and powder perfumed and
Flowers many, *darba* grass and *vilvam* leaves
With holy water washing the feet, give the bath and
Over the earth make elegant elevation of three by three.

Upon the pedestal, the peepal and Śivaliṅgam
Among the two, plant one
In the honored shrine to the north or east
Perform sixteen homages of love.[312]

Regarding the posture in which the body is to be buried, the early texts are silent, but in the first stanza of the *Tirumantiram* passage quoted above we are instructed to place the body in the pit sitting in the lotus posture. This is the posture assumed by Jñāneśvar, as described by Nāmdev in his purported eyewitness account. Although the early texts make no mention of burial posture, this very well may have been the procedure from early on. These early texts describe the spreading of *darbha* grass upon which the body is to be placed. This may indicate that the body was to be in the seated position, as *darbha* grass is one of the traditional substances used for an auspicious meditation *āsana* (seat). Moreover, skeletons dating from the third-second century BCE have been found at Ujjain in seated meditation posture. In her excavation report on skeletons found at Balathal in Rajasthan, Gwen Robbins states, "The fifth skeleton, from a different era (sixth century BCE), was of an adult male 35

[312] *Tirumantiram* 7.19.1914-1922. Translation from Somasundaram 2010: 2062-69.

to 40 years old and had been buried in a seated position that resembles the modern samadhi burial of sadhus who renounce the world" (see Figure 21).[313]

Burial Markers

In terms of burial markers for *samādhi* shrines, they can vary widely, from a simple flat stone to an elongated rectangular sarcophagus shape, the latter of which are common to Sufi *dargāh*s and are most likely of Islamic origin (see Figure 22).[314] However, one of the most common markers for *samādhi* shrines is the square, step-pyramid shape comprising of three to five layers, which may be topped by a *liṅga* (see Figure 23). Such markers are in accordance with the dictums of the twelfth-century *Tirumantiram*.[315] This step-pyramid marker is the form of Jñāneśvar's *samādhi* stone as well as the *samādhi* stones of his two brothers, *sans liṅga* (see Figure 24). Like the other practices associated with the Hindu *samādhi* shrine tradition, I will seek to demonstrate that this type of *samādhi* marker has pre-Islamic roots in ancient India. To do so I will turn initially to the Buddhist *stūpa* for assistance, as I contend that the *stūpa* points the way towards understanding not only the origin of such *samādhi* markers but their underlying purpose as well.

From our discussion regarding the reasons for burying the body of a realized sage in Hindu traditions, it is easy to recognize that the marker of such a burial site is

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[313] See Bakker 2007: 34, n77; Robbins et al. 2007: 1-26.

[314] There is also the ubiquitous memorial stone that can be found across India. These stones act as a marker for the place of death of a local hero, or simply as a memorial for the dead hero, but unlike *samādhi* markers, they do not mark the burial place of mortuary remains. Thus, they are not discussed here. On memorial stones, see Sontheimer 2004abc; Harlan 2002; Coccari 1989; Khare 1982: 251-54.

[315] *Tirumantiram* 7.19.1922.

not considered simply a memorial; it marks a *tīrtha*, sacred site, which is a localized instantiation of sacred power radiating forth from the mortal remains left behind by the realized sage. One may recognize here a resonance with Buddhist *stūpa* worship. Not only does the Buddhist *stūpa* contain the relics (mortal remains) of the Buddha or other Buddhist masters, but as such the *stūpa* is understood to radiate the presence of the Buddha or Buddhahood. After a brief analysis of the purpose and structure of Buddhist *stūp*s, we will turn to an examination of the Hindu antecedents of *samādhi* shrine markers discussed in certain Vedic and post-Vedic texts.

Stūpa

It is the perceived presence of the realized sage in his bodily remains that gives a *samādhi* site its sacred power. The same is true for a *stūpa*. It is the perceived presence of the Buddha in his relics that gives the *stūpa* its power.[316] This presence of the Buddha-in-object can be traced back to significant doctrinal issues in early Buddhist traditions concerning the locus of the Buddha in his physical, and thus mortal, body.

It was recognized during the Buddha's life that his presence is needed in order for the teachings to be given and for merit to be distributed. There is a widespread story that expresses this notion. It is found in Buddhist texts of varying dates throughout Asia, which for many scholars is a sign of its early appearance in the tradition. The lesson revolves around a visit to the Buddha by a king, who upon arrival at the monastery found that the Buddha was not present. In some versions the

[316] For an extensive consideration of Buddhist relic worship in India, see Strong 2004; Trainor 1997: 32-65.

Buddha had gone to visit another holy site. In other versions he had gone to a heavenly realm in order to give teachings. Regardless, he was not present at his monastery when the king arrived. The result was that the king found the place worthless without the Buddha.[317] Donald Swearer describes it this way: "When King Pasenadi and his entourage fail to see the Buddha, the monastery is considered to be totally empty; only its form remains. The Buddha must be *seen*, that is, he must be present for the ritual to be efficacious, for the *dhamma* to flourish, and for the *saṅgha* to prosper. The king of Kosala, therefore, is justifiably distraught when he visits the Buddha only to find him absent."[318] This story illustrates the importance of the Buddha's presence in order for his teachings to flourish.

What is highlighted by this story is the problem the tradition will face when the physical body of the Buddha is no longer present. How will the teachings continue to be given; how will merit be bestowed if the Buddha is not present? The Buddha addresses this issue when confronted by the king regarding his absence. The king expresses his wish to have an image of the Buddha created for the benefit of all. The Buddha agrees, and when the Buddha approaches the completed image, the image stands in salutation to the presence of the Buddha, while the Buddha in return expresses his recognition that this image will radiate his teachings after he has left his physical body behind and attained *parinirvāṇa*.[319] As expressed in this story, the solution to the problem of the absence of the Buddh's physical body lies in the

[317] Swearer 2004: 14-15.

[318] Swearer 2004: 17.

[319] Swearer 2004: 15.

Buddha becoming embodied in physical objects that can then be directly engaged in ritual and that will infuse the surrounding space with the radiating field of the Buddha's influence. In this way, such realized embodiments of the Buddha will bestow grace on all those in their presence, in the same way that the Buddha himself bestowed grace on those around him before his *parinirvāṇa*. Again I turn to Swearer: "Ritual at all levels depends on the presence of the Buddha, in person, image, or represented by material sign."[320]

How can the presence of the Buddha come to occupy such objects? In an essay on funerary rituals, Gregory Schopen cites textual sources in which the presence of the Buddha is held to be invested in the places that he visited during his sojourn on earth.

> After having the Buddha say "After I have passed away, monks, those making the pilgrimage to the shrines [where something significant happened in his life] . . . will come, they will speak in this way, ['Here the Blessed One was born,' 'here the Blessed One attained the highest most excellent awakening,' etc.] . . ." that version has him then say, "Those who during that time die here with a believing mind *in my presence*, all those who have *karma* still to work out, go to heaven." [I]t seems fairly clear that the monk redactor of the text thought that the Buddha was, after his *parinirvāṇa*, in some sense actually present at the places where he is known to have formerly been.[321]

The sites that the Buddha had visited while living are thus held to be infused with his merit-bestowing presence.

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[320] Swearer 2004: 17. This presence of the Buddha in person, image or sign is known as *nirmāṇakāya,* a constructed body projected by the Buddha. On this process, see White 2009: 177-180.

[321] Schopen 1997: 117.

Schopen also cites textual sources that claim that this same presence is established in the Buddha's relics.

> The learned should know the qualities of the Buddha, and that if one worships with similar devotion the Seer when he is present, or if one worships his relics after he has entered final Nirvāṇa, the result is the same.[322]

With regard to such claims, Schopen asserts, "The implications here are that there is no distinction between a living Buddha and a collection of relics—both make the sacred person equally present as an object of worship, and the presence of either makes available the same opportunity to make merit."[323] Thus, relics are held to be endowed with the same presence that King Pasenadi recognized as being essential for the Buddha's teachings and merit to be bestowed. Such relics are in turn installed in *stūpa*s or sculpted images of the Buddha.

With regard to the *stūpa*, the Mahāparinibbāna-Suttanta narrates an account of Ānanda putting a question to the Buddha concerning the proper manner of dealing with his relics.[324] Gustav Roth paraphrases this passage as follows:

> When Ānanda asks how then the funeral rites of the Buddha should be performed, the Buddha replies that they should be performed according to the funeral rites of a *Cakravartin*, a ruler of a *cakra*, by custom due to an emperor. The Lord gives further details how to proceed with the funeral rites concluding that the bones should be deposited in a golden urn . . . , a *stūpa* of his physical body . . . at the cross roads of four main roads . . . [should be] built, along with umbrellas, banners, [and] flags.[325]

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[322] Schopen 1997: 132, 147, n.76.

[323] Schopen 1997: 132.

[324] Mahāparinibbāna-Suttanta 36.7.

[325] Roth 1980: 183.

Anagarika Govinda has pointed out that the *stūpa*s that house such relics have their roots in the ancient *tumuli*, or burial mounds, where remains of "heroes, saints, kings or other great personalities" were entombed.[326] However, he emphasizes the special status of *stūpa*s as symbols of *nirvāṇa*, the enlightened consciousness of the Buddha.

> Thus the caitya is elevated from the service of the dead to the service of the living. Its meaning does not remain centered in the particular relics, or the particular personality to whom those remains belong, but in that higher actuality which was realized by the Holy Ones. . . .
>
> Thus, the stūpas did not become objects of hero worship, but symbols of nibbāna, of illumination.[327]

The *stūpa* is meant to benefit both the living and the dead within its field of radiance. The housing of the Buddha's relics within a *stūpa* establishes a fixed location of the presence of the Buddha—a location that followers of the Buddha can visit on pilgrimage to receive his blessings. They can also arrange for their remains to be brought and deposited nearby, so that even in death they can remain in the presence of the Buddha and continue to receive merit from him.

Regarding the structure of a *stūpa*, it is interesting to note that the term *caitya* is used to refer to the pre-Buddhist *tumuli* that gave rise to the Buddhist *stūpa*. *Caitya* is derived from the word *citi*, meaning "to pile up," and harks back to the Vedic fire altar.[328] This is an important notion to hold onto as we consider the structural components of the *stūpa*. The term *stūpa* likewise carries the meaning of a "heap" or

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[326] Govinda 1976: 3.
[327] Govinda 1976: 5.
[328] In the Jain tradition, the term *caitya* is also used to refer to a *mūrti*, though this is a contested definition. See Cort 2010: 104-09.

"pile of earth or bricks," possibly from the root *stūp*, "to heap up, pile, erect."[329] According to the Vinaya Kṣudrakavastu, the Buddha describes the basic components of a *stūpa* as consisting of a set of four concentric terraces topped by the *aṇḍa* (literally, "egg") dome in which the "pot" of relics is placed. Affixed to the *aṇḍa* is a *yaṣṭi*, or pole, which will have anywhere from one to thirteen umbrella canopies attached to it.[330] In this way, the structure is piled up in a series of terraces, upon which the "egg" chamber is constructed in which the enlivened relics of the Buddha or Buddhist master are placed, and the structure is capped by an axial staff rising out of the top of the "egg" chamber, shaded by successive umbrellas called *bhūmikā*s (see Figure 25).[331]

Eḍūka/Aiḍūka

Aside from the entombed presence of a realized being, what does the structure of a Buddhist *stūpa* have to do with a Hindu *samādhi* shrine marker? If we go back to the Buddha's remarks to Ānanda from the Mahāparinibbāna-Suttanta about interring his remains in a *stūpa*, we will notice that the Buddha points to an earlier tradition of burial markers from which the Buddhist *stūpa* is derived—a tradition suitable for a *cakravartin* (literally, "turner of the wheel"), which is a reference to a great king. This would indicate a pre-Buddhist practice of burial markers for at least kings, if not heroes and sages, in the late Vedic culture. The existence of such structures during the

[329] Monier Williams 1260.

[330] Roth 1980: 184.

[331] For a thorough discussion of the symbolism of the *stūpa*, and its relation to the broader context of Indian iconography, see Snodgrass 1985.

early Buddhist period is suggested by another Buddhist text, in which King Kaniṣka (second century CE) is described as accidentally worshiping a non-Buddhist *stūpa*.[332] Moreover, in another conversation with Ānanda, the Buddha suggests that such *stūpa*s could contain the remains of sages of great attainment—a practice similar to the later *samādhi* shrine tradition. In this section of the Vinaya Kṣudrakavastu, Ānanda has gathered the relics of Śāriputra, one of the Buddha's most adept disciples. Ānanda's reason for holding on to these relics implies that they are invested with the illumined consciousness of Śāriputra, but the Buddha instructs Ānanda to relinquish Śāriputra's relics to a layman who has come to worship them by placing them in a *stūpa*. Gustav Roth notes, "Buddha motivates his order by pointing out to Ānanda that *brāhmaṇa*s and laymen are accustomed to such type of worship, through which they manifest their faith."[333]

With regard to the Vedic practice of raising a mound over the remains of the dead, Pandey comments, "The Hindu Śāstrakāras reserved this honour for great saints, monks, and *sanyāsin*s only," and "in the case of distinguished *parivrājaka*s [the burial] mound developed into a memorial."[334] What would one of these non-Buddhist *stūpa*s look like? The Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa (ca. fifth-sixth century CE), in the final portion of its section on the construction of temples to specific Hindu deities, contains a chapter dedicated to a structure with no deity whose components are strikingly similar to, yet at the sometime significantly different from, the Buddhist

[332] See Hastings: 902.
[333] Roth 1980: 184.
[334] Pandey 1969: 263, 271, n. 157.

stūpa. This structure is called an *aiḍūka*. The *aiḍūka* is made up of three consecutive square terraces, stacked one on top of the other. In the middle of the top terrace a *liṅga* is installed, out of which rises a square *druva* (pole) with thirteen *bhūmikā*s (floors) affixed to it. Above this is an *amalasāraka* (*āmalaka*) with a medallion of the sun and moon attached (see Figure 26).[335] Shah, among others, is convinced that the *aiḍūka* is derived from the term *eḍūka* and that it refers to a Śaiva bone-relic container.[336] Etymologically, the Sanskrit term *eḍūka* is most likely related to the Pāli term *eluka*, which is used in the Mahāvastu to denote a relic-chamber. This term has three likely roots, all of which are Dravidian. "*Eluka*," Allchin argues, "may relate to . . . √ *ĕḻu* 'arise', and hence, . . . *ĕḻu* 'column' and 'pillar'," or to "*ĕlu* 'bone' or . . . √*iṭu* 'lay down, bury'."[337] Given these possible etymologies, an *eḍūka* could be a marker consisting of either a pillar, a bone chamber, a burial chamber, or perhaps all three.

We will consider the notion of the *eḍūka* as pillar later. First we will turn our attention to the *eḍūka* as bone chamber and burial marker. The earliest occurrence of the term *eḍūka* is in the Mahābhārata, where it is used disparagingly to describe the end of times when tomb worship will have surpassed worship of the gods.

> This world will be totally upside down: people will abandon the Gods and worship charnel houses (*eḍūka*s), and the serfs will refuse to serve the twice-born at the collapse of the Eon. In the hermitages of the great seers, in the settlements of brahmins, at the temples (*devasthāna*s) and

[335] Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa, Adhyāya 84; see Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa 1990: 233-34.

[336] Shah 1952; Agrawala 1948: 167-68.

[337] Allchin 1957: 2

> sanctuaries, in the lairs of the Snakes, the earth will be marked by charnel houses (*eḍūka*), not adorned by the houses of the Gods (*devagṛha*), when the Eon expires, and that shall be the sign of the end of the Eon. When men become for good gruesome and lawless meat eaters and liquor drinkers, the Eon will collapse.[338]

As Olivelle has suggested, the term *eḍūka*, as used in the Mahabharata, points to an "other," but we must ask the question, who is this other? Many scholars, Olivelle included, take the term as most likely pointing to Buddhists with their focus on *stūpa* worship, and therefore the passage has generally been understood to be a polemical attack on the Buddhists, who posed a threat to bramanical orthodoxy.[339] But could this other refer to a different group? The Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa's use of the term *aiḍūka,* and its relation to *eḍūka,* point to a possible Śaiva reference. This direction takes on greater weight when considering the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa's discussion of burial markers. This Vedic text, with reference to similar burial structures, notes a difference between an Āryan marker, which is square while housing the remains beneath it in the earth, and a non-Āryan marker, which is round while housing the remains inside of it.

> Four-cornered (is the sepulchral mound). . . . Wherefore the people who are godly make their burial-places four-cornered, whilst those who are of the Asura nature, the Easterns and others, (make them) round, for they (the gods) drove them out from the regions. . . .
>
> Whence those who are godly people make their sepulchres so as not to be separate (from the earth), whilst those (people) who are of the Asura nature, the Easterns and others, (make their sepulchral mounds)

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[338] Mahābhārata 3.188.64-67. Translation from van Buitenen 1975: 596.

[339] Olivelle 2010: 191-93. Lassen is the source of the theory that the Mahābhārata's use of the term *eḍūka* points to the Buddhists. See Lassen 1838: 490.

> so as to be separated (from the earth), either on a basin or on some such thing.[340]

These two verses point to two striking features that are characteristic of the early Buddhist *stūpa*: they were round, not four-cornered, and they hold the relics in a relic-chamber (*aṇḍa*), which is raised above the ground on top of the terraces of the structure. Given that these two features are considered non-Āryan by this Vedic text, could the adoption of such a structure by early Buddhists be another example of their rejection of the brahmanical tradition, along with rejecting Sanskrit, the authority of the Vedas and Brahmins, and the system of *varṇa*s (social classes). A question then arises, is this early four-cornered Āryan marker with mortuary remains beneath it an *eḍūka*/*aiḍūka* and the round one a precursor to the Buddhist *stūpa*?[341] If so, then perhaps those *eḍūka*s mentioned in the Mahābhārata are not Buddhist but rather derive from some nonbrahmanical or anti-brahmanical group, who engaged in worship of their *guru*s and their relics. It is widely attested that the early Śaiva sects were anti-brahmanical and antinomian. Perhaps they are the "gruesome and lawless meat eaters and liquor drinkers" mentioned in the Mahābhārata passage? In his comments on pre-Buddhist burial markers, Rhys Davids makes some interesting comments in this regard:

> This was done more especially by those who had thrown off their allegiance to the priests, and were desirous to honour the memory of their teachers, who were leaders of thought, or reformers, or philosophers. And whether we agree, or not, with the opinions these thinkers put forth, we must acknowledge the very great interest, from

[340] Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa 13.8.1.5; 13.8.2.1.

[341] I am not the first one to ask such a question. See Shah 1998: 173, n. 3.

> the historical point of view, of the fact that the only monuments of the kind yet discovered were built out of reverence, not for kings or chiefs or warriors or politicians or wealthy benefactors, but precisely for such thinkers, who propounded fresh solutions of the problems of life. We need not be surprised, therefore, to learn that the priestly records carefully ignore these topes.[342]

Although it is not possible to determine with certainty whether the Śaivas are the implied target of the Mahābhārata's pejorative remarks against those who perpetuate the worship of *eḍūka*s, the *aiḍūka* that is described in the later Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa as a terraced structure topped by a *liṅga* is certainly a Śaiva structure—and I would argue that it is more specifically a Śaiva burial marker. The fact that the *aiḍūka* is included in the Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa may attest to the gradual brahmanization of certain Śaiva groups by the time of this fifth-sixth century text—a text post-dating the Mahābhārata by several hundred years.

Some scholars are inclined to broaden the target of the Mahābhārata's pejorative remark to include all those who partake in relic worship, including both Buddhists and Śaivas. Bakker remarks on this perspective:

> This is not to say that the composer of this passage was exclusively thinking of Buddhism. He might have lashed out at all pan-Indian practices frowned upon by the orthodox that involved the erection of monuments over mortuary remains. *Eḍūka* thus seems to be a wider term than, for instance, *stūpa*, and it clearly has here, if not in all cases where it occurs, a pejorative connotation.[343]

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[342] Davids 1903: 82.

[343] Bakker 2007: 33, n. 76,

Although the *eḍūka* may very well be the burial marker for early Śaiva tombs, without firmer evidence it seems prudent to maintain the broader perspective suggested by Bakker.[344]

Yaṣṭi

In John Irwin's analysis of early *stūpa*s, a curious and familiar aspect is at play that we should recognize from our earlier consideration of the Vedic fire altar. Irwin comments regarding the role of the *yaṣṭi*, axial pillar, in the *stūpa*:

> [T]he primary component of the early *stūpa* had been an axial pillar of wood. In the earliest stage, this pillar had not been erected simply to mark the centre of the mound: it had taken structural precedence over the raising of the mound itself, the latter serving as an envelope to enclose it. Later, when earthen *stūpa*s were superseded by more permanent structures in brick and stone, the axial function of the original type of monumental pillar was taken over by a comparatively slender pole or staff (*yaṣṭi*) bearing one or more umbrellas at its summit.[345]

Irwin goes on to discuss at length how the *yaṣṭi* is often referred to as Indra's nail (Indra-*kīla*), which, according to Vedic mythology, Indra used to fix the primordial mound to the cosmic ocean in order to establish a foundation for creation—a *pratiṣṭhā*. This act of piercing mother earth by the male god is reminiscent of the *pratiṣṭhā* that takes place in the *garbhagṛha*, womb-chamber, of a temple, where, in the Śaiva context, *pratiṣṭhā* is brought about by the union of Śiva and Śaktī with the establishment of the *liṅga* in the *pīṭha*. In the case of the *stūpa*, it is reminiscent of the "piercing" of the egg-chamber (*aṇḍa*) in which lies the *dhātugarbha* ("relic embryo"), by the *yaṣṭi*, central pillar.

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[344] See also Goswamy 1980: 5-7; de Marco 1987: 228f.
[345] Irwin 1980: 12.

Bakker has studied some early examples of what he feels may very well be monumental *aiḍūka*s, and in them can be seen this same concern for a central, often hollow, column.[346] This configuration contains structural similarities to the Vedic fire altar with its central column of perforated bricks, through which the *yajamāna* in the form of the golden *puruṣa* rises on his *prāṇa* to the immortal realm beyond the fire.[347] The structural similarities between the structure of the Vedic fire altar and the structure of a tomb are explicitly recognized by the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa, which asserts that the tomb of a *yajamāna* who has performed the *agnicayana* ritual should be built to resemble the fire altar.

> Now as to the order of procedure. For an Agnicit (builder of a fire-altar) one makes the tomb after the manner of the fire-altar; for when a Sacrificer builds a fire-altar he thereby constructs for himself by sacrifice a (new) body for yonder world; but that sacrificial performance is not complete until the making of a tomb; and when he makes the tomb of the Agnicit after the manner of the fire-altar, it is thereby he completes the Agnicityā.[348]

The step-pyramid *samādhi* markers that dot the land in India, including Jñāneśvar's and those of his brothers, closely resemble fire altars (see Figure 27). Bakker also emphasizes that the structure of the *aiḍūka*/*eḍūka* contain "echos of the Vedic *citi*."[349] During at least one excavation of a potential *aiḍūka*, a sculpted *puruṣa* was found buried in the lower terrace with a hole for the bottom portion of the central column bored into the center of his chest, like the golden *puruṣa* of the fire altar lying

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[346] Bakker 2007: 31-35.

[347] See chapter 1.

[348] Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa 13.8.1.17. I have changed Eggeling's dated transliteration in the case of "Agni*k*it," and "Agni*k*ityâ."

[349] Bakker 2007: 43.

at the base of its central column.[350] Yet it is not only the fire altar that these burial markers resemble. As we have seen, the temple also has a similar ascension mechanism as part of its structural design, with its hollow column running from the *mūrti* in the *garbhagṛha* up through the body of the temple, extending beyond in pillar fashion to terminate at the *āmalaka*, capped by the *kalaśa*. This *āmalaka*, as discussed earlier, is equated with the sun and the *kalaśa* with the immortal realm of Brahman beyond.[351] This is the same sun that is pierced by the *parivrājaka* and the *yogayukta* at the time of death in order to attain the immortal realm, never to return. The sun is also situated at the top of the *aiḍūka'*s pillar, which itself extends from the *aiḍūka'*s *liṅga*. The disk of the sun is fixed to the top of the pillar along with a representation of the moon, another celestial body associated with a realm beyond death—that of *pitṛloka*, the world of the ancestors.

The resonances do not stop here. Not only do many of the early *stūpas* and apparent *aiḍūka*s have hollow columns rising through their central axis, but many of these columns also share another curious characteristic. Their outer shape is often divided into thirds, with the lowest section being square and embedded in the earth, while the central section is octagonal, and the top rounded (see Figure 28). As discussed earlier, this threefold division is a governing characteristic of the *liṅga* as specified in the Vāstu-Śāstra and Śilpa-Śāstra.[352] The square portion represents

[350] Bakker 2007: 28, Plate 3. On the golden puruṣa of the fire altar, see chapter 1.

[351] See chapter 1.

[352] See chapter 2. With regard to the possible roots of the tripartite *liṅga* in the *yūpa*, see Biardeau 2004: 38, n. 11 and 39, fig. 2).

Brahmā and the earth, the octagonal section represents Viṣṇu and the eight directions of space, and the round section represents Śiva and the heavenly realm. Together they represent the totality, the unmanifest absolute together with the manifest cosmos, and this is a characteristic that Shah argues is the hallmark of the *aiḍūka*. Thus, like the *liṅga* in a Śiva temple, the *aiḍūka* can be understood in this contaxt as a sculpted form of the formless—a notion, we shall see, that is also associated with the body of the realized sage, as attested by Jñāneśvar.

Bakker argues that the *aiḍūka*, as described in the Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa, is a Hindu structure that differs from the *eḍūka* from which it derives, because where as the *eḍūka* contains remains, the Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa makes no mention of such remains in its discussion of the *aiḍūka*. Bakker posits that the Hindu *aiḍūka* is more of a cenotaph, an empty memorial to the dead, rather than an actual burial marker containing remains. This, according to Bakker, is due to the brahmanical tradition's great uneasiness with the impurity issues associated with mortal remains. Bakker asserts that, contrary to the Buddhist tradition's embrace of relic worship, the Hindu reluctance to tie the *aiḍūka* to human remains rendered it "futile," and thus there was hardly ever an occasion to construct one—literally, "it never got off the ground."[353] To counter Bakker's argument, I would point to the plethora of step-pyramid *samādhi* markers spread across the length and breadth of India, including those of Jñāneśvar and his brothers, which I contend are the descendants of the *eḍūka*/*aiḍūka*. The difference in numbers between Buddhist *stūpa*s and Hindu

[353] Bakker 2007: 43.

samādhi shrines may be due in part to the different internment processes. Where as in Hindu traditions the body of the realized sage is buried whole in a single location, in Buddhist traditions, the post-cremation mortuary remains that constitute the relics may be divided up and distributed to any number of locations to be installed in a *stūpa*. With respect to the remains of the Buddha, Aśoka (third century BCE) is held to have redistributed them to no less than 84,000 *stūpa*s across India.[354] Nor are Buddhist relics limited to the mortuary remains of the Buddha and great Buddhist teachers; *stūpa*s can also house objects worn or used by them as well as texts containing the *dharma* itself.[355] In Hindu traditions, relatively few people are believed to have attained the status of a realized sage. Thus, given the rarity of this attainment, coupled with the singular tomb marker that indicates the realized sages burial location, it should not be surprising that physical evidence of Hindu *samādhi* burial is sparse.

Guru as *Mūrti*

In this chapter we mapped out the Indian roots of the *samādhi* burial tradition—from the act of taking *samādhi* to the practice of burying the body of the realized sage to the development of the *samādhi* burial marker—and we saw how each of these elements is connected to Hindu notions of ascension to the immortal plane.

Although the reason for burial instead of cremation is not discussed in the Dharma Sūtras, Kane speculates that it grows out of the fact that such an ascetic

[354] On the continuous dividing and redistribution of the Buddha's relics, see Hastings: 901-904.

[355] See Kinnard 2001: 152.

would have already given up his domestic fires when he took his vows. As such, he no longer has a fire in which to be cremated.[356] Later texts such as the *Smṛtyarthasāra* (twelfth century CE) argue that such an ascetic is not cremated because he has already been burned in the fire of *yoga* or *tapasya*,[357] and in the modern ritual of *saṃnyāsa*, the renunciant is guided to symbolically witness his own cremation.[358] Moreover, it should be noted that the body of the realized sage who has attained Brahman is revered by his followers as a *tīrtha*, sacred site. The *Kaulajñānanirṇaya* states, "A man having bathed him [the realized sage], gains the merit of bathing in all tīrthas," and the Kubjikāmata Tantra asserts that the perfected sage is none other than a *tīrtha*:

> The person who recognizes the fivefold self (*ātma*) in his own body is identical with all sacred fords (*tīrtha*); the *tīrtha*s themselves are only artificial. He is a *siddha* (perfected one) among all people, no matter where his abode may be. By his power a *tīrtha* comes into existence; a *tīrtha* is not a place [merely] filled with water. Those who are made perfect by the realization of wisdom, who are able to procreate wisdom—the place on which they take their stand, that is a *tīrtha* in the supreme sense of the word. Vārāṇasī, Kurukṣetra, Naimiṣa, Bhairava, [in short], all *tīrtha*s are there where a *guru* is present.[359]

With such notions in mind, we can begin to consider why the burial place of the body of the realized sage is held to be so sacred. When the average person dies, it is by means of *prāṇa* that he or she transmigrates to other realms and eventually takes birth again.[360] Moreover, it is by means of *prāṇa* that the karmic impressions of the

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[356] Kane 1973: 230-31.

[357] Kane 1973: 958-59.

[358] Bharati 1970: 153-55.

[359] *Kaulajñānanirṇaya* 7.41; Kubjikāmata Tantra 10.104b-108a. See Goudriaan 1983: 98.

[360] Chakravarty 2001: 134.

person's past actions and merit (*puṇya*) are carried forward to bear fruit in future lives. However, the realized sage who has attained Brahman has no future births. What happens to his *prāṇa* and the great merit accrued by such a being? The Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad (ca. seventh-sixth cen. BCE) states:

> A man who does not desire—who is without desire, who is freed from desire, whose desires are fulfilled, whose only desire is his self—his breaths do not advance upward (*na tasya prāṇā utkrāmanti*). Being *Brahman* he goes to *Brahman*.[361]

In referring to this Upaniṣadic passage, Muktananda comments:

> When an ordinary human being dies, the soul leaves the body and, according to its karma, goes on to take another form. But in the case of great beings who have realized their oneness with Brahman, with the highest Reality, with the all-pervasive Being, Consciousness, and Bliss (*sat cit ānanda*) the *prana* does not travel to other planes; it does not leave the body.[362]

The *puṇya*, merit, of a person is stored in the *prāṇa*, and the *prāṇa* of a realized sage remains in the crown of the head where he last concentrated it just prior to his departure from the body. His merit thus remains in his body, stored in his *prāṇa,* and the body is thus revered as a locus of sacred power. It is the recognition of the presence of this *prāṇa* that contributes to the eventual development of a fullfledged

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[361] Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad 4.4.6. Regarding the *pada* that reads *na tasya prāṇā utkrāmanti*, I have altered Olivelle's translation which reads "his vital funtions (*prāṇa*) do not depart" to "his breaths do not advance upward," as this is not only a more direct translation, but it resonates with David White's excavations of the use of *ut*-√kram that are pertinent to this discussion, and more specifically, to the process that we have been considering, by which the realized sage leaves the body at death.

[362] Muktananda 1996: 58. Ramana Maharshi also points to the importance of this passage when discussing the moment an enlightened one drops the body and attains *brahmaloka*. See Venkataramiah 2003: 515-16.

shrine worship tradition focused on the burial places of such realized beings. In this regard, Muktananda comments:

> The *tapasyā* of these great beings after realization of Brahman is not for their personal use, because they have nothing left to attain. It is for the benefit of others. This power remains in their *samādhi* shrines. Actually, this power is the same as the all-pervading pure Consciousness. The same Consciousness is within you, and it manifests in different forms according to your faith; thus, you have the darshan of saints and sages.[363]

As a locus of sacred power, the body of a realized sage is buried, and the space of burial marked with a stone *samādhi* marker. In the next two chapters, we will examine the transition from burial marker to tomb shrine worship and the influences that drive that development by means of a case study exploration of Jñāneśvar's *samādhi* shrine compound in Āḷandī.

[363] Muktananda 1998: 114-115.

CHAPTER 5
Nāths, Sufis, and *Samādhi* Shrines

According to the Vārkarī tradition, in 1296 CE when Jñāneśvar was twenty-one, he excavated a cavern underneath a Śiva temple, entered it, and instructed his companions to wall up the entrance behind him. Then, sitting in a meditative posture, he entered *saṃjīvan samādhi* (living *samādhi*), or self-willed absorption into the unmanifest absolute, and departed his physical body.[364] More than seven hundred years later, scores of devotees come daily to his *samādhi* shrine to receive his blessings and his merit, which are said to radiate from his body, permeating the entire temple compound within which it is situated. His tomb marker sits in the center of a square *garbhagṛha* and is surmounted by a classic temple *śikhara*, which dwarfs that of the pre-existing Śiva temple situated next to his shrine (see Figure 43).

Sources of the Tradition and Historical Controversies

The earliest evidence we have for a renowned poet-saint named Jñāneśvar can be found in the commentary on the Bhagavad Gītā attributed to him, which is dated in the text itself to 1290 CE. There are three other texts credited to a Jñāneśvar, two of

[364] This is a practice associated with the Nāth Siddha tradition, of which Jñāneśvar was a member. Such practices were discussed in the previous chapter. See, for example, Dasgupta 1962: 215-216.

which, *Anubhavāmṛta* and *Cāṅgadeva Pāsaṣṭī*, use language and philosophical concepts similar to those found in the Gītā commentary and are thus believed to have been penned by the same person. The fourth text, the *Jñānadeva Gāthā*, is a collection of *abhaṅga*s to Viṭṭhal attributed to Jñāneśvar, but it uses language that is more modern and simple. Some scholars therefore question whether the thirteenth-century Jñāneśvar wrote these *abhaṅgas*, an issue that we will consider shortly.

The next textual evidence concerning Jñāneśvar's life comes from Nāmdev, another venerated poet-saint of the Vārkarī tradition who in his writings claims to have been a close companion of Jñāneśvar. Nāmdev wrote a biography of Jñāneśvar, much of it in the form of an eyewitness account. This biography, which is the primary source for our account of Jñāneśvar's life, is divided into three parts: *Ādi*, which focuses on Jñāneśvar's ancestors, his birth, and his life with his siblings; *Tīrthāvalī*, which concerns his travels throughout the north of India with Nāmdev; and *Samādhi*, which focuses on the days leading up to, and the actual event of, Jñāneśvar's entry into *samādhi*.[365] The Vārkarī tradition dates Nāmdev from 1272-1350 and claims that he died at the age of eighty, more than fifty years after witnessing Jñāneśvar's entombment.[366] A number of scholars have argued that he could not have been born much earlier than the late fourteenth century, and thus it would have been impossible for him and Jñāneśvar to have overlapped.[367] Many of these same scholars posit a second Jñāneśvar, whom they claim wrote the more simple and modern *abhaṅga*s in

[365] *Nāmadeva Gāthā* 872-1096.

[366] Ranade 2003:185-87; Tulpule 1979: 334-35.

[367] See, for example, Kiehnle 1997a: 3-4.

praise of Viṭṭhal and was a companion of Nāmdev, but did not write the Gītā commentary and other philosophical texts, which they attribute to an earlier Jñāneśvar.[368] If this is true, then we still have the problem of Nāmdev conflating the two Jñāneśvars into one character, as the Jñāneśvar of Nāmdev's biography is clearly the author of the Gītā commentary as well as the brother of Nivṛtti, Sopāṇ, and Muktābāī. Moreover, the date of 1290 for the composition of the *Jñāneśvarī*, upon which the discrepancy between the dating of Nāmdev and Jñāneśvar is based, has itself been called into question. Kiehnle argues that the verse from the *Jñāneśvarī* that declares the date of its composition is an addition made by Eknāth (1533-1599) during his sixteenth-century editing of the text.[369] If this is true, then Eknāth's date is a projection back onto the text and thus is Eknāth's sixteenth-century assumption of a thirteenth-century composition date. Nevertheless, an earlier verse of the *Jñāneśvarī* notes the reigning Yadava king at the time of the composition as Ramachandra.[370] Even if the specific date of 1290 can be called into question, the mention of Ramachandra grounds the text within the window of his reign, 1271-1309.

The scholars in support of the two Jñāneśvars theory point to obvious differences in the language and focus of the two sets of texts. They argue that the philosophically sophisticated author of the *Jñāneśvarī*, *Anubhavāmṛta*, and *Cāṅgadeva Pāsaṣṭī* could not have authored the *Jñānadeva Gāthā* consisting of such

[368] For a list of scholars for and against the two Jñāneśvars theory, see Kiehnle 1997a: 2-3.

[369] Kiehnle 1997a: 5.

[370] *Jñāneśvarī* 1804.

simply formulated *abhaṅga*s. Yet the *Jñānadeva Gāthā* is part of the oral performance tradition, which is far more fluid than the written traditions and shifts its language with the passage of time. Such oral traditions tend to resist the fixity of the written text, a point that Christian Novetzke has made clear.[371] This might account for the more simple and modern style of the *abhaṅga*s by the time of their incorporation into a written text. The strongest argument for the two Jñāneśvars is the lack of reference to Viṭṭhal or his worship in the more philosophical texts, in contrast to focus on Viṭṭhal worship in the *Jñānadeva Gāthā*. However, the traditional account resolves this problem by crediting Nāmdev with introducing Jñāneśvar to the worship tradition of Viṭṭhal after he had completed the philosophically oriented texts.

Another problem concerns Nāmdev's biography of Jñāneśvar, which is found in the *Nāmadev Gāthā*, the collection of Nāmdev's *abhaṅga*s. Most scholars now recognize that due to the oral nature of the *abhaṅga* tradition, Nāmdev's corpus has been added to over time by the *kīrtankār*s who perform his songs. Not only that, but we have the emergence of several "Nāmas" in the tradition over several centuries. Compounding this conundrum is the fact that, although the oldest dated manuscript of Nāmdev's biography of Jñāneśvar taking *samādhi* is from the late sixteenth century, the earliest published edition is from the eighteenth century.[372]

In addition to Nāmdev's biographical account of Jñāneśvar, there are other *abhaṅga*s written by many of Nāmdev's contemporaries that mention Jñāneśvar in

[371] Novetzke 2008: 74-80, 145.
[372] Novetzke 2009: 220.

Āḷandī, but these are subject to the same dating issues, as they all are from expanding corpora that were not written down until substantially later. These are *abhaṅga*s attributed to Jaṇābāī, Cāṅgadev, Chokhāmeḷā, as well as Jñāneśvar's siblings, Nivṛtti, Sopāṇ, and Muktābāī. Eknāth mentions another biography of Jñāneśvar, one written by a disciple, Satyāmalanāth, but no copy of this text has been located.[373] Finally, we have the *Bhaktavījaya* and the *Bhaktalīlāmṛta*, the eighteenth-century hagiographical accounts of the principal Maharashtrian poet-saints by Mahīpati. However, those sections that deal with Jñāneśvar are all drawn from Nāmdev's biography. Although the clouded origins of Jñāneśvar's life and relation to Nāmdev are problematic, there is still much we can learn about him through the texts attributed to him, and it is with the intention of furthur contextualizing Jñāneśvar and his teachings that we now turn our attention to his lineage.

Jñāneśvar's Nāth Lineage

Although Jñāneśvar was the inspiration for what became the major Maharashtrian Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* tradition, he himself was a Nāth Yogi, a predominantly Śaiva esoteric tradition of itinerant wonder-workers. In his commentary on the Bhagavad Gītā, he traces his lineage back through the founding *guru*s of the tradition to Śiva himself. Jñāneśvar's line of initiatory authority moves from Ādināth (Śiva), through Matsyendranāth, Gorakṣanāth, Gahiṇināth, to Nivṛttināth, his immediate *guru* and older brother.[374] As the initial human *guru* in the tradition, Matsyendranāth's origin

[373] See Tulpule 1979: 347, n. 191, where he cites *Eknātha Gāthā*.

[374] *Jñāneśvarī* 18.1751-58.

story is shrouded in legend, but he is now believed to have lived some time around the ninth to tenth centuries CE. Gorakṣa was his greatest disciple and inheritor of the lineage. The hagiographic tales of their encounters with each other are spread across the entire Indian subcontinent. In fact, it has proved impossible to pin either of these figures down, as they show up in so many distinct regional traditions—from Bengal to the Punjab, Nepal and Tibet to Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Karnataka, and Tamil Nadu. These two fountainheads are critical figures for some of the most important developments in the medieval esoteric traditions. They are both included on the list of eighty-four Mahāsiddhas or Siddhācāryas of the Buddhist Vajrayāna tradition. Matsyendranāth is credited as the founding figure of the Yoginī Kaula traditions of *tantra*, to which some of Gorakṣanāth's early literature is also connected. In addition, the Nāth tradition is credited with the development of *haṭha yoga* and the focus on Kuṇḍalinī as the indwelling goddess. Their itinerant wanderings created a vast network for the transmission of esoteric ideas and practices throughout the subcontinent.[375] Their impact cannot be overstated.

Matsyendranāth and Gorakṣanāth's connection to Maharashtra is perhaps most evident in the texts attributed to them or in the texts of those traditions they are said to have initiated. Matsyendranāth's *Kaulajñānanirṇaya* is said to be the root text

[375] The most comprehensive studies of the Nāth Sampradāya are Briggs 1982 [1938]; Dasgupta 1962; Dvivedi 1981. For an overview of the Sanskrit literature attributed to the tradition, see Larson 2008. For an in depth discussion of the Nāth relationship to the *siddha* alchemical tradition and a detailed mapping of regional lineage lists of the Nine Nāths, see White 1996. On the Nāth tradition and *haṭha yoga*, see Mallinson 2011a; 2011b; 20012. On the Nāth tradition in Maharashtra, see Kiehnle 1997ab; Dhere 1981; White 1996: 112-14.

of the Yoginī Kaula traditions, and Sanderson points to a Maharashtrian origin for the early literature of one of the Kaula's four subsets, the Paścimāmnāya (Western Transmission School).[376] This particular subset claims to have been formed by the famed Nine Nāths. Although this group has a revolving membership from region to region, the nine associated with this specific claim are likely from the Deccan, with one of them hailing from the Koṅkaṇa coast of Maharashtra-Goa-Karnataka. In addition, Abhinavagupta makes mention of Matsyendra's consort, Koṅkaṇā, another possible reference to a Maharashtrian setting for the emergence of Matsyendra's Kaula tradition.[377]

Regarding Gorakṣanāth, the two earliest examples of Marathi literature, the *Viveka-Darpaṇa* and the *Gorakha-Gītā* (ca. twelfth century CE), are attributed to him, and both have resonances with Jñāneśvar's teachings.[378] Along these same lines, James Mallinson points to the Sanskrit *Vivekamārtaṇḍa* and *Gorakṣaśataka* attributed to Gorakṣanāth as having possible Maharashtrian origins due to their similarities with Jñāneśvar's discussions on *yoga* found in his *Jñāneśvarī*.[379] Although not of the Nāth tradition, the *Līḷācarita*, a text of the early Maharashtrian Vaiṣṇava sect the Mahānubhāvas, mentions Matsyendranāth and Gorakṣanāth and speaks of the interaction of the Mahānubhāvas founding *guru*, Cakradhara, with many of

[376] Sanderson, unpublished paper cited in Mallinson 2011b: 7.
[377] White 1996: 87-89; Sanderson 1988: 681.
[378] Tulpule 1979: 314-15. Dhere 1959: 137-38. Cited in Kiehnle 1997a: 10.
[379] Mallinson 2012: 5, 7.

Matsyendra's and Gorakṣa's followers, noting them all by name.[380] Jñāneśvar's own writings situate these revered founding figures of his lineage in Maharashtra. In his famed Gītā commentary, he speaks of Matsyendra's appearance on Saptaśṛṅgī, a mountain range near Naśik, which is one of the *śākta pīṭha*s associated with the distributed body of the Devī.[381] Another Marathi Nāth text attributed to Jñāneśvar but probably of a later date, the *Yogisampradāyaviṣkṛti*, claims that Gorakṣanāth's birthplace is at the headwaters of the Godāverī River near Tryambakeśvar.[382] This is the same location where Nivṛttināth, Jñāneśvar's brother and *guru*, is said to have received initiation from Gahiṇināth. It is also the location of his brother's final resting-place, for Nivṛttināth's *samādhi* shrine is tucked up against the hill to the west of the Tryambakeśvar Temple, one of the twelve revered *jyotirliṅga*s of Śiva. In addition, two of the modern day *pālkhī*s of the Vārkarī pilgrimage to Paṇḍharpur hail from the Maharashtrian-claimed *samādhi* sites of Matsyendranāth and Gorakṣanāth located near the town of Kolhāpur, two of several such claims across India, given the apparent nomadic wanderings of these figures.[383] This all points to the strong

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[380] Kiehnle 1997a: 8-9.

[381] *Jñāneśvarī* 18.1732. In the Puranic myth of Śiva's wife, Satī, Śiva wanders and in some tellings flies through out India carrying the corpse of the self-immolated body of his wife. In order to separate him from his grief and thus stabilize the universe, Viṣṇu cuts away parts of her body, which fall to the ground creating sacred seats (*pīthā*s) recognized as embodiments of the Devī. There are said to be 108 such sites across India, though in reality, several hundred claim membership to this list. Saptaśṛṅgī is associated with the descent of one of Devī's arms.

[382] Cited in White 1996: 134, 422, n. 82.

[383] A *pālkhī* is a Maharashtrian palanquin on which are carried the *pādukā*s (sandals) of the saint on their pilgrimage for Viṭṭhal's *darṣan* in Paṇḍharpur. Vaudeville 1974: 158.

possibility that both Matsyendranāth and Gorakṣanāth not only spent time in Maharashtra but could very well have compiled their revered teachings in the region during the centuries just prior to Jñāneśvar, making it all the more likely that Jñāneśvar was deeply exposed to the textual sources of these related esoteric traditions.

A number of scholars have argued that the Nāth Yogis have been less concerned with metaphysics and more focused on the physical practice of *yoga* associated with the *haṭha* system they are credited with developing. This is certainly true of the most well-known texts of the *haṭha yoga* schools, such as the fifteenth-century *Haṭhayogapradīpikā* attributed to Svātmārāma. This text has proved to be quite influential among groups of more contemporary Nāth Yogis, as was experienced by George Briggs in his early twentieth-century ethnographic work, in which he comments on the Nāth Yogis' seeming unfamiliarity with the textual sources of the tradition, perhaps due to the high level of illiteracy among the Nāths with whom he spent time.[384] Even so, Briggs does point out that as the most well-known text of the *haṭha yoga* schools, the *Haṭhayogapradīpikā*, was quite influential among this group. As has been shown by many scholars, the *Haṭhayogapradīpikā* is primarily drawn from the early medieval texts attributed to the Nāth Yogis, most notably those of Gorakṣanāth mentioned above.[385] Although the *Haṭhayogapradīpikā* shies away from an extensive discourse on metaphysics, these early textual sources of

[384] Briggs 1982: 251.

[385] See for example Larson 2008: 455-56.

the founding *guru*s of the tradition are more forthcoming, and in this regard they reflect a nondual stance.

In speaking of the *Kaulajñānanirṇaya* of Matsyendranāth, P. C. Bagchi states, "The Akulavīra Tantra insists on the superiority of the Sahajas and the complete identity of the sādhaka and Śiva."[386] The text of the *Kaulajñānanirṇaya* itself is explicit in this regard.

> Listen, O Vīracāmuṇḍā, to the characteristics of jīva. It is supreme, whole eternal, consisting of nothing, stainless. It is the ultimate atomic particle, the Nāth, it is Supreme Śiva, all pervading, it is ultimate . . . .[387]

Chapter 20 of the same text describes the internal process of liberation and the character of its attainment.

> . . . Piercing the skull, the jīva becomes stainless. . . . Such a one has both knowledge and discrimination and a nondual nature.[388]

The *Gorakṣaśataka* proclaims, "In the highest stage a knower of Yoga always attains non-duality, as milk poured into milk, or ghee into ghee, or fire into fire."[389] The *Śiddhasiddhāntapaddhati*, regarded as the most authoritative text of the Nāth tradition, is another text ascribed to Gorakṣanāth.[390] It also makes clear that the goal is a nondual state.

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[386] Bagchi 2007: 29.

[387] *Kaulajñānanirṇaya* 6.4-5.

[388] *Kaulajñānanirṇaya* 20.2,22.

[389] *Gorakṣaśatakam* 100.

[390] Most scholars date this text to somewhere between the eleventh to thirteenth centuries and thus, congruent with other early texts attributed to Gorakṣanāth, but Mallinson argues that this text was not compiled until the eighteenth century and

> By the constant practice of contemplation on one's own true nature, the great *siddhayogīs* get possessed of that form. By possessing such form, there arises the great state of *nirutthāna* (undisturbed state of consciousness). Thence by the glory of *saccidānanda*, the flash of a miraculous glow appears. Thereby the illuminating state of consciousness called *paramapada* (Absolute), which is beyond all appearances and duality and non-duality supervenes. This is the truth.[391]

In reference to these early texts, Dasgupta has concluded, "From these descriptions it will appear that the state of non-duality, bereft of all disturbance of mentation, is the final state of yoga. . . . If we are to give the answer in a nutshell, we should say that the final aim of the Nāth Siddhas was the attainment of Śivahood in and through the attainment of immortality."[392]

Similarly, in his *Anubhavāmṛta*, Jñāneśvar states, "The salt giving up itself becomes the ocean, so giving up my ego I am united with Shiva and Shakti."[393] In his *Jñāneśvarī*, he takes an even more pronounced nondual position.

> [A person] whose mind is no longer aware of feelings of pleasure and pain or of good and evil deeds,
>
> He sees all kinds of distinctions and strange things as merely the limbs of his own body.
>
> But what need is there to be specific? A person who has realized that he is one with everything in the universe,
>
> Although he has a body and the world may consider him happy or unhappy, yet I am certain that he is truly the Eternal.

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therefore acts as a later synthesis of Nāth teachings. See Mallinson 2012. On the earlier dating of this text see Larson 2008 and Gharote 2005.

[391] *Siddhasiddhāntapaddhati* 5.8.

[392] Dasgupta 1962: 217-18.

[393] *Anubhavāmṛta* 1.63.

> Therefore, O Arjuna, strive to realize this oneness, to see the universe in yourself and yourself in the universe.
>
> For this reason, I repeatedly tell you that there is no higher realization than the awareness of unity.[394]

As has already been mentioned, both Dhere and Mallinson have noted similarities between Jñāneśvar's texts and those of the early Nāth tradition. This resonance extends to the nondual stance. As an example, I cite a verse of the *Śiddhasiddhāntapaddhati*, which is resonant with the above quote from Jñāneśvar. It proclaims, "He is called an *avadhūta* who always experiences himself in every self and also every self in himself and perceives the universe as non-distinct from himself."[395] Speaking specifically about the *Vivekamārtaṇḍa* and *Gorakṣaśataka*, Mallinson points out, "This evidence suggests that [these texts] represent the Sanskrit textual underpinnings of the integration of Śaiva physical yoga and Vedanta in early medieval Maharashtra."[396]

This nondual positioning of the early Nāth texts perhaps parallels the development of the more radical nondual synthesis of Abhinavagupta and the Pratyabhijñā School of the Trika Kaula of Kashmir (ninth-eleventh centuries). Such resonances are to be expected if we remember that the *Kaulajñānanirṇaya* of Matsyendranāth is seen as the founding text of the Yoginī Kaula traditions from which the Trika springs. This is not to argue that all the Kaula texts are nondual. In fact, between the *Kaulajñānanirṇaya* and the nondual Trika system there is a critical

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[394] *Jñāneśvarī* 6.404-09.

[395] *Śiddhasiddhāntapaddhati* 6.15.

[396] Mallinson 2011b: unpublished 6-7, n. 30.

Paścimāmnāya text, the *Mālinīvijayottaratantra*, which Sanderson argues is dual. Even so, the dual position of this text is unpronounced enough for Abhinavagupta to utilize the *Mālinīvijayottaratantra* as the pivotal text in the Śaiva tradition that allows him to absorb the entire dual Śaiva Siddhānta corpus and sublimate it under his nondual Trika system.[397]

As a Maharashtrian *yogin* from the thirteenth century, Jñāneśvar is arguably quite distant from the Pratyabhijñā school, yet Jñāneśvar's texts fall squarely in a nondual category that resonates in many ways with the Trika position. While it is premature to argue that Jñāneśvar was influenced or even knew of the Pratyabhijñā school of Abhinavagupta and his followers, he clearly was familiar with the root text of that tradition, the *Śiva Sūtra*s of Vasugupta (ninth century), as he directly quotes from it in his *Anubhavāmṛta*.[398] Moreover, Abhinavaupta tells us that he learned the Trika nondual teachings embedded beneath the dual veneer of the *Mālinīvijayottaratantra* from his *guru* Śambhunāth. In keeping with the tradition of mapping one's lineage out of respect for the transmission flowing through it, Abhinavagupta further notes that Śambhunāth's *guru*, his own grand-*guru* Sumatināth, was a Nāth Yogi from Maharashtra who held the seat of authority at the famed Mahālakṣmī Temple in Kolhāpur.[399] I note these connections as an indication that these seemingly distinct regional textual traditions that derive from Kashmir, Tamil, Maharashtra, and the like were in reality interconnected, most likely by means

[397] Sanderson 2005 97-112; Sanderson 1992: 292-93.

[398] *Anubhavāmṛta* 3.16.

[399] Sanderson 2005: 120, 122-23, ns. 107, 108, 109.

of the itinerant Nāth tradition. Thus, we can see that Jñāneśvar's nondual teachings have resonances and ties with the broader medieval Nāth and Śaiva traditions. With this contextualization of Jñāneśvar and his teachings among the broader Nāth Yogi traditions, we can now turn to an initial consideration of the development of a shrine worship tradition focused on his *samādhi* site in Āḷandī.

Blossoming of *Samādhi* Shrine Worship in Āḷandī

As with the origins of many traditions, the historical evidence at this time of Jñāneśvar's life and connection to Nāmdev is murky at best. Even so, what evidence we do have does give us some critical information with regard to the development of the temple worship tradition we see today in Āḷandī. Regardless of the issues surrounding the historical dating of Jñāneśvar, what we are most concerned with here is the tradition of worship that developed around the figure presumed to be sitting in *samādhi* in the Śiva temple compound in Āḷandī. How far back can we trace the Vārkarī tradition's remembrance of Jñāneśvar in Āḷandī? The textual evidence of this remembrance begins with Nāmdev's biography of Jñāneśvar. Novetzke suggests that the *Samādhi* section of Nāmdev's biography is part of the oldest core of the Nāmdev corpus, perhaps associated with the fourteenth-century Nāmdev.[400] Currently, however, the earliest known manuscript containing Nāmdev's *Samādhi* narrative is from 1581.[401] Therefore, at this time the earliest datable evidence of the knowledge of Jñāneśvar's *samādhi* site in Āḷandī is this 1581 manuscript expounding the *Samādhi*

[400] Novetzke 2008: 147-149.

[401] Novetzke 2009: 220.

biography portion of the *Nāmdev Gāthā*. For our purposes here, it is most interesting to note that in this text, as we will see in the next chapter, we have a Śiva temple, a *samādhi* marker, and an annual festival in honor of the entombed realized sage. What we do not have is temple worship. In fact, none of what we have excavated so far explains the existence of the *samādhi* shrine worship tradition.

Although we have established an early tradition of *samādhi* burial in India dating from as early as the Vedic Āraṇyaka period, there is no indication in this evidence of worshiping these sites associated with the realized sages buried underneath the markers. What is missing from this picture is a worship tradition focused on a daily ritual schedule of interaction with this marker enshrined in a shrine structure such as the one that we witness today at Jñāneśvar's site in Āḷandī. In fact, if we take Nāmdev's biography as authoritative, there is no evidence here of temple worship. What exists in Nāmdev's narrative is a stone marker placed on the ground marking the spot under which the meditating body of the realized sage, Jñāneśvar, sits in *samādhi*. The only indications of ritual Nāmdev alludes to are the yearly return to celebrate the event of Jñāneśvar's *saṃjīvan samādhi* and the joyous festivities leading up to it. In this regard, what we can discern in Nāmdev's narrative is a burial site of a revered figured that matches a tradition of long established Hindu burial practices for the realized sage.

Other than the annual celebration, the site presumably consisted of a burial marker outside an existing Śiva temple associated with the Nāth Siddha tradition. This picture matches other known Nāth *samādhi* sites, such as those found on

Mṛgasthalī Hill near the famed Paśupatināth Temple in Kathmandu, at Gorakh Bansuri in the Cantonment of Dum Dum near Calcutta, and at a Vairāg Panth compound in the village of Padu Kala in rural Rajasthan.[402] By the time of Eknāth in the sixteenth century, the picture in Āḷandī appears much the same except that the annual celebration seems to have been forgotten. Some time between Jñāneśvar's self-entombment and the late sixteenth century, the site where Jñāneśvar took *samādhi* was apparently forgotten, as is evident from Eknāth's purported visit to the *samādhi* site when he found it abandoned and overgrown with jungle. He is said to have cleaned the site and reestablished a practice of Jñāneśvar worship in Āḷandī. Eknāth is also believed at this time to have produced a critical edition of the *Jñāneśvarī*, the date of which is recorded in the colophon of an existing manuscript as 1584, just three years after the earliest known manuscript of Nāmdev's biography of Jñāneśvar.[403]

What this event coupled with Nāmdev's biography makes clear is that there was no *samādhi* shrine worship tradition in Āḷandī prior to the late sixteenth century. This alone is critical, yet Eknāth's visit is far more significant, for this event also marks the shift in Āḷandī from *samādhi* burial site to *samādhi* shrine worship with an architectural temple structure and a daily ritual schedule.

With Eknāth's rediscovery of the neglected *samādhi*, Maharashtra reawakens to the celebration of Jñāneśvar's presence in Āḷandī. In fact, Eknāth is credited with

[402] See Briggs 1982: 123-24; White 1996: 93-94.
[403] Novetzke 2008: 142-43.

establishing focused worship of Jñāneśvar at the site. It is at this time that the initial shrine superstructure is believed to have been built and subsequent land grants established to support the worship at the site. We might ask, what is different in Eknāth's Maharashtra from Jñāneśvar's Maharashtra that would explain the sudden focus on ritual worship of Jñāneśvar at the site of his *samādhi*? To understand this, we must look to the broader horizon of Eknāth's Maharashtra.

Sultans, Sufis, and *Dargāh*s

Eknāth was a *deśastha* brahmin in the ancient seat of Maharashtrian brahmanical authority, Paiṭhaṇ. This is the same town where Jñāneśvar and his siblings had to come in order to petition their reacceptance into the caste. What was different was that the political hub of Maharashtra during Jñāneśvar's life, the Yadava kingdom of Devgiri, sixty-five kilometers north-northwest of Paiṭhaṇ, was now under Turko-Pursian rule. The watershed moment came the same year as Jñāneśvar's volunteer *mahāsamādhi*. In 1296 the Yadava Kingdom of Ramachandra commanded from the mountain fortress of Devgiri (Deogiri) was sacked by Allauddin Khalji for the Delhi Sultan, Muhammad bin Tughluq (r. 1325-51), who subsequently moved the entire seat of the sultanate from Delhi to the massive hill-fort and changed its name to Daulatabad.[404] The forced relocation proved unsuccessful and the Sultan eventually returned his court to Delhi, yet the Muslim stronghold of Maharashtra had been established. As the sultanate power waned, Daulatabad was absorbed into the

[404] On Devgiri, see Verma 1970. On Daulatabad, see Ansari 1983; Mate/Pathy 1992. For a fourteenth-century description of Daultabad, see Ibn Baṭṭūta 1976:168-71. On eighteenth-century Hindu and Muslim narratives of this space, see Green 2012a: 228-259.

emerging Ahmadnagar Sultanate, while further southeast Gulbarga and Bijapūr also arose as significant Muslim power states. At the time of the Delhi Sultan's initial relocation to Daulatabad, his accompanying Chishti *pīr*s settled the town of Khuldabad some nine kilometers north of Daulatabad on the plateau above the famed Ellora cave complex.[405] The town, along with Gulbarga, became a center of Deccan Sufi culture.

While most of the Sufi orders in India trace their lineage back to the original *ummah*, Muslim community, if not to the Prophet Muhammad himself, the most significant incubator for their development was in tenth to twelfth century Khurasan, Iran, from where they constructed a history linking them back to an earlier pious, studious, literate subgroup of the broader scholar class in mid-ninth-century Baghdad. These early Sufis were invested in a direct experiential relationship with God that was supported by and in turn verified scripture and thus endowed these early Sufis with a certain spiritual authority.[406] This experiential knowledge propelled these Sufis to deeply embody the scriptural tradition through study and memorization and at the same time to act in the world in a manner that reflected this deeper knowledge. Thus, they became spiritual and moral barometers of behavior in the world for their communities. This rising Sufi literate class merged with ascetic movements in Khurasan to become the first institutional orders as we know them before pushing

[405] The town was originally called Rawza (Heavenly Garden), but was changed to Khuldabad after the burial there of Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb to reflect the title *khuld makan* (sheltered in eternity). See Green 2012a: 168.

[406] On the early development of the Sufi traditions and their movement into India, see Rizvi 1978: v1, 114-240; Green 2012b: 15-124.

into India with the migration away from Mongol-invaded Iran and Afghanistan in the thirteenth century.

These institutional orders, known as *tariqa*s (paths), were organized around a Sufi master and a spiritual geneology (*silsila*). These Sufi masters were identified by any number of terms, such as *walī* (friend of God), *shaykh* (title of respect), *murshid* (guide), and *pīr* (healer and guide).[407] These *pīr*s resided in their own *khānqāh* (lodge or hospice).[408] The *khānqāh* was a distinct Khurasani development that was to become a major feature of Sufi *tariqa*s in India. These Sufi lodges consisted of a group of dedicated disciples living in the compound of their master who directed their spiritual development. Acceptance into many of these *khānqāh*s required the taking of specific vows by which the disciple would live. These *khānqāh*s became meeting-grounds for dignitaries, officials, and wealthy merchants, as well as the residing disciples, who were interested in spiritual dialogue with the master. More than this was the attraction of simply being in the presence of a Sufi master, as such a person is understood to be a close friend of God (*walī*) through whom God's *baraka*, blessing and power, radiates.[409] In this way, God's grace is held to flow through the Sufi master to not only govern miraculous occurrences (*karāmat*) but also to penetrate and bless those under the guidance of the master, fulfilling both spiritual and worldly desires. The placing of oneself in the presence of this radiant *baraka* is the gravitational pull that inspires the general populace to flock to the *khānqāh*s of such

[407] See Currie 1989: 1-8.

[408] Green 2012b: 55-60. For an in depth discussion of the *khānqāh*, see Khan 2004.

[409] See Currie 1989: 11-12.

masters. As such, the *khānqāh*s serve not only as lodges for close disciples but also hosting institutions for an ongoing rotation of guests who must be fed and, in many instances, housed. Over time these *khānqāh*s became not only hubs of spiritual instruction but also places of refuge for the needy and the poor, with free kitchens and lodging for travelers.

Included in this relational interaction with the Sufi master in his *khānqāh* is an exchange system of gift-giving, called *ta'wīdh-futūḥ*. *Ta'wīdh* is an amulet blessed by the saint that is considered to hold his *baraka*, and it is offered to those who come to pay their respects to the Sufi master. It is customary for devotees to make offerings, termed *futūḥ*, in return as a sign of gratitude. In the *khānqāh*s of very popular *pīr*s enormous amounts of *futūḥ* are often acquired, which are in turn redistributed to the community.[410]

Periodically a master may designate a disciple as a *khalīfa*, a *silsila* lineage descendant through whom God's *baraka* will continue to flow. Such a spiritual successor will eventually move on to form his own *khānqāh*, often in some location given to him by his master. Along with being the sole authority of his *khānqāh*, a Sufi master projects a power over the region associated with his *khānqāh*. The term for this power plays with the notion of the master as "friend of God" in the Arabic term *walī*, who thus projects *wilāyat*, the Persian term for "governance." In this regard, the Sufi *pīr* is understood to govern over a spiritual realm that covers the region around his *khānqāh*, with distinct borders where his *wilāyat* abuts the *wilāyat* of his

[410] Eaton 2003b: 265-66.

neighboring Sufi brothers, who are masters in their own realms. Within a master's *wilāyat*, he is responsible for the well-being of the region as well as the spiritual guidance and protection of those within his realm.[411]

As these Sufi orders began to establish *khānqāh*s in the Indian subcontinent, they were visited by all manner of the Indian populace—and most importantly, for our purposes, the wandering Nāth Yogis. Thus began a significant interaction between Sufis and Nāths. Although the Sufi orders did not penetrate into Maharashtra until the fourteenth-century migration of the Delhi Sultanate, the mixing of the waters between Sufis and Nāth Yogis was well underway in the north by the thirteenth century. Given the network of Nāth wanderings, ideas and practices exchanged through this mixing most likely traveled quickly throughout the Indian subcontinent. In Delhi Nizamuddin related stories of challenges between Sufis and *yogin*s that result in the triumph of the Sufi master.[412] A Sanskrit text on *haṭha yoga*, the *Amṛtakuṇḍa*, was translated in the medieval period into Persian, Arabic, Ottoman Turkish, and Urdu.[413] In these translations, particularly the Arabic, the Nāth and *haṭha yoga* traditions have been absorbed and sublimated under an Islamic veneer, which identifies the Nāth lineage of Matsyendra, Gorakhṣa, and Caurańgi as the Muslim prophets Khidr, Jonah, and Elijah. In the Islamic context, Elijah, who in this text is identified with Caurańgi, is granted eternal life by God and is often represented flying. These are two hallmarks of the Nāth Yogi tradition: immortality and

[411] See Digby 2003: 241-42.
[412] Digby 1970: 12.
[413] Rizvi 1978: 335.

khecarī.[414] Through one of the translation traditions of this text, North African Sufis were taught yogic techniques transmitted through an order known as *al-Jukiyya*—that is, Jogi.[415] In addition, Muslim playwrights expressed a familiarity with Hindu mythology, social structures, and Nāth Yogi techniques, and certain Sufi orders absorbed all manner of ascetic yogic practices, including bowing before the master (*guru*), offering water to visitors, shaving the head, and wearing ocher robs.[416] A mid-fifteenth-century text called *Rushd Nāma* compares the Sufi philosophy and practice of union-in-diversity with the teachings of Gorakṣanāth.[417] Carl Ernst points out that there is even a biography of Gorakṣanāth written by a Muslim.[418]

During Akbar's reign, many *yogin*s visited his court and it is said that Akbar had a special place for them called Jogipura where he would meet with them to discuss philosophical doctrine and yogic methods.[419] This mixing is even reflected in a Mughal court painting composed during the reign of either Shah Jahan (r. 1627-1658) or Arangzeb (r. 1658-1707). In his book on the public memory of Nāmdev, Novetzke refers to this painting in order to discuss its representation of Nāmdev, a Maharashtrian Vārkarī *sant*, in the company of a dozen Hindu *sants* and Sufi *pīrs*. Among the individuals represented are Matsyendranāth and Gorakṣanāth, both of

[414] Ernst 2005: 39.
[415] Ernst 2005: 31.
[416] Alam 2004: 82-91.
[417] Alam 2004: 92.
[418] Ernst 2005: 33.
[419] Alam 2004: 93-94.

whom are identified by the title *pīr*.[420] Even the Isma'ilis were influenced by their encounters with the Nāth tradition. Dominique-Sila Khan comments that the Nāth Yogis had a major impact on the development of the literature and rituals of Isma'ilis in India.[421] While these examples are taken from Muslim sources and generally sublimate the Nāth tradition under the supremacy of Islam, the Nāth tradition does much the same in the other direction.

Nāth Yogis were known to be quite open to the Sufi traditions and even boasted about Muslim royal and military leaders seeking their guidance or outright discipleship. Through their interactions, Nāth Yogis became just as informed about Islamic traditions as Sufis were about Nāth perspectives and techniques. They even go so far as to claim that Gorakṣanāth taught *yoga* to the Prophet Muhammad under the guise of Abu al-Rida Ratan, who is said to have lived for 600 years and met the Prophet in his homeland.[422] This interaction is developed further over centuries, as Briggs, in his early twentieth-century ethnographic work with the Nāth tradition, comments on the number of Muslims that are members of Nāth lineages and also notes the percentage of Nāths that are practicing Muslims. He also notes an encounter in Baluchistan with Muslims who were in charge of a Nāth shrine, and he also emphasizes that the heads of many Nāth *maṭh*s are referred to by the title of *pīr*.[423]

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[420] Novetzke 2009: 50.

[421] Khan, D. S. 2000: 286.

[422] Ernst 2005: 36-37.

[423] Briggs 1982: 92, 66, 71, 106-10, and regarding Nāth leaders being refered to as *pīr*s, see for example 123.

This deep encounter that began in the thirteenth century between these distinct religious traditions moves south with the fourteenth-century Turko-Persian push into the Deccan. The blending of Hindu and Muslim populaces in Maharashtra during the life of Eknāth is reflected in the various courts of the time, as is noted by Stewart Gordon:

> Throughout the reign of Sultan Ibrahim II (1580-1627), we must see in Bijapur a vibrant, syncretist kingdom, its ruler highly interested in Hindu thought and music, its art affected by the many Hindu artisans it employed, and a majority of Hindus in both its army and administration. . . . At court, even the language reflects this syncretism. The court was dominated by "Dakkanis," that is Muslims who had been living in the south for generations. Their language was a mixture of the Arabic and Persian of their origins, the North Indian Urdu of their past, the Sanskrit of the Brahmins, and the Marathi, Telegu [*sic*], and Kanada of their subjects. This "Dakkani" language became the official language at court as well as the practical language of the bazaar and camp.[424]

In Maharashtra, as in the north, the mixing of the cultural waters of Muslims and Hindus extends to the Sufi and Nāth traditions. Maharasthtra may very well be the source location for the translations of *Amṛtakuṇḍa*. The location of Matsyendranāth's initiation of Caurańgināth, who we recall is associated with Elijah in *Amṛtakuṇḍa* translations, is identified by Jñāneśvar as having been on Saptaśṛṇgī Mountain near Tyambakeśvar.[425] Moreover, the conflation of the Nāth lineage with Islamic prophets was widespread enough in the Deccan by the early fifteenth century to warrant a polemical critique by more orthodox Muslims.[426]

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[424] Gordon 1993: 50-51.
[425] *Jñāneśvarī* 18.1732.
[426] Digby 1970: 4.

Gahiṇināth, Nivṛtti's *guru*, and, according to Nāmdev, the *guru* of Jñāneśvar's paternal grandfather, is identified by at least one tradition in Maharashtra as a Sufi by the name of Gaibī Pīr.[427] Yet Sufi names for Nāth Yogis may very well have developed as a protection device in the face of a suspicious Muslim polity, as is claimed in the *Navanāthabhaktisāra*.[428] Nevertheless, by Eknāth's time the practice of Hindus worshiping the Chishti *pīr* Dāvamalak was widespread in Maharashtra.[429] Eknāth himself was familiar enough with Muslim traditions to write a satirical debate between a Hindu and a Turk that mocks narrow-minded religiosity and the inability to recognize God beyond limiting religious views in both traditions.[430] Eknāth reveals in this tale the polemical tensions existing between the two religious populations of Maharashtra at this time. Nevertheless, certain individuals such as Eknāth possessed the ability to recognize the value of both Hindu and Muslim perspectives. This is perhaps best exemplified by Sheikh Muhammad (1560-1650), a beloved figure of Maharashtrian devotional Sufism who was even praised by Hindu traditionalists.

> While Muslims call him *saccā pīr* (the true *pīr*) the Maraṭhās call him *sadguru* (the true *guru*). The[re] is no difference between these two. Brothers open your eyes. . . . Among the Maraṭhās it is the *sadguru*. For the Muslims it is *saccā pīr*, who enables one to cross the ocean of existence.[431]

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[427] Skyhawk/Duncan 1997: 410.

[428] Cited in Skyhawk/Duncan 1997: 410. Also see Ernst 2005: 24, n.34.

[429] Wagel 2001: 147-48.

[430] See Zelliot 2003.

[431] *Yogasaṃgrāma* 17.3, 16.57. Quoted in Wagel 2001:142.

By the sixteenth century, Eknāth's Maharashtra was saturated with Sufi presence with its popular traditions of tomb-shrine worship. Even though Eknāth resided in the stronghold of Maharashtrian brahmanical culture, he was well acquainted with life in the Turko-Persian fortress of Daulatabad, as his own *guru*, Janārdana, was the *killedāra*, military officer in charge of the fort, which was at that time under the dominion of the Sultan of Ahmadnagar. Eknāth spent much time at this fort in service of his *guru*. Moreover, Janārdana's own *guru* is now recognized to have been the Sufi *pīr* Cānd Bodhale, a testament to the blending of Nāth and Sufi culture by means of the very life-breath of a tradition, the lineage line.[432] Even so, Eknāth was compelled to conceal his *guru*'s lineage under the guise of a mystical initiation by Dattātreya, the revered mythical *guru* said to be the incarnation of the *trimūrti*—Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and Śiva. According to Eknāth, Dattātreya appeared to Janārdana in the form of a Sufi *faqīr*. This is a common trope in the Maharashtrian milieu, in which Dattātreya is held to assume this form in order to test potential disciples in their ability to look beyond religio-cultural appearances to the unity of God.[433]

Eknāth could conceal the religious affiliations of his lineage because it was not about the "religious tradition" but about the source of the spiritual transmission that runs through the lineage. In this case he points to Dattātreya as the source, which

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[432] See Bendre 1958: 71; Dhere 1967: 84-118; Tulpule 1979: 353, 377. For a description of the evolution of this discovery, see Skyhawk 1992: 67.

[433] Tulpule 1994: 166-67. On the Dattatreya tradition in Maharashtra, see Rigopoulos 1998; Morse 2012. On the Dattatreya tradition's relationship to the Nāth tradition, see Dasgupta 1962: 207, n. 3; White 1996: 395-96, n. 64.

allows him to embrace both religious expressions while appearing to stay true to Hindu *dharma*. Janārdana's *guru*, Cānd Bodhale, was himself the disciple of Rāje Muhammad, Sheikh Muhammad's father, and unquestionably from a Qādiri Sufi lineage. His traditional name was Said Cāndasāheb Kādrī, as Bendre and subsequently Tulpule have shown. However, Dhere claims that Cānd Bodhale was a brahmin.[434] Nevertheless, he exhibited an outward Sufi appearance and had many Muslim followers. Whether brahmin or Sufi, his disciples were Janārdana and Sheikh Muhammad, his own *guru*'s son. Thus Janārdana was *guru*-brothers with one of the most revered Sufi *pīr*s of Maharashtra, who in turn is believed to have been the *guru* of Śivājī's grandfather, Maloji.[435] At the same time, Janārdana, and Eknāth more so, give expression to Hindu *bhakti*, which is grounded in the brahmanical Sanskritic tradition. The seeming acceptability of this apparent dichotomy would not have been lost on Eknāth and must have represented the ability of the *pīr* and *guru* traditions to manifest through either Muslim or Hindu idioms.

At the beginning of this section, we asked the question, what is different about Eknāth's Maharashtra from Jñāneśvar's? Along with the incursion of Turko-Persian polity, there is the more significant arrival of the various Sufi brotherhoods. With regard to our exploration of Jñāneśvar's *samādhi* shrine, it is not only these Sufi lineages that concern us. More importantly, it is what they brought with them: a fully developed institutional tradition of tomb-shrine worship in the form of the *dargāh*.

[434] Tulpule 1979: 353, 377; Dhere 1967: 88-89.

[435] Burman 2001: 1229.

The practice of burying the deceased master in the grounds of his *khānqāh* dates to the very foundational period of these lodges, and there is evidence of pilgrimage to such graves as far back as eleventh-century Khurasan.[436] By the time these Sufi brotherhoods spilled across India, the practice of visiting the graves of past masters (*ziyārat*) had grown into a full-fledged worship tradition centered on the *dargāh*, or tomb-shrine of the saint. The catalyst for this worship tradition is the understanding that when a Sufi *pīr* dies, his *baraka* is said to adhere to his place of burial.[437] A *dargāh* shrine is therefore created over his buried body, and the space is held to be sacralized by the saint's *baraka*. The shrine functions in much the same way as the *khānqāh* yet has the added focus of devotional worship centered on the tomb of the *pīr* that is held to be infused with the saint's *baraka*. As such, devotees come to receive the blessing of his *baraka* by visiting the *dargāh*.

India is dotted with thousands of major and minor Sufi *dargāh*s, with the most renown associated with the dominant figures in the Chishti brotherhood—notably, Muinuddin in Ajmer, Baba Farid in Pakpattan (Pakistan), and Nizamuddin in Delhi. As has already been mentioned, the town of Khuldabad near the fort of Daulatabad in Maharashtra became a major center of Sufism in the Deccan. Khuldabad eventually grew into the site of a vast Sufi *dargāh* complex containing some 105 tomb-shrines,

[436] Green 2012b: 60.

[437] Eaton 2003b: 264, 266.

the major ones belonging to the Chishti order with many other brotherhoods represented as well.[438]

Given the Sufi connection to Eknāth's lineage, it is highly likely that he would have been exposed to this tomb-shrine worship of past masters situated so close to his *guru*'s home. In fact, a widely expressed Maharashtrian tradition claims that when Cānd Bodhale left his mortal body, Janārdana enlisted the assistance of Eknāth in building his *dargāh* at the foot of the hill-fort of Daulatabad.[439] Hindu apologists argue that they built his *samādhi* structure in the guise of a *dargāh* in order to protect it from potential Muslim backlash. If this is the case, why did Eknāth not do the same for his *guru* when he left his body? Instead, Janārdana's *samādhi* marker rests inside a cave at the crest of the hill-fort. If Eknāth did help in the construction of Cānd Bodhale's *dargāh*, then it is more likely that he did so because that was the protocol for his grand-*guru*'s tradition. Indeed, there is ample evidence of Hindu familiarity and comfortableness with the Sufi *dargāh* tradition. The *dargāh* of Janārdana's *guru* brother, Sheikh Muhammad, in Śrīgoṇḍa is a major pilgrimage destination of syncretic renown in Maharashtra that is frequented by Muslims and Hindus alike, and his is not the only one.[440] To this day there are a large number of *dargāh-samādhi* compounds, which blend Muslim and Hindu practices and are frequented by both

[438] On Khuldabad, see Ernst 1992; 2005; Green 2012a.

[439] I have yet to locate any historical documentation regarding Eknāth's involvement with Cānd Bodhale's *dargāh*.

[440] Burman 2001: 1229-30.

Muslims and Hindus.[441] On the other hand, Janārdana's mountaintop *samādhi* not only acts as a physical counterweight to Cānd Bodhale's *dargāh* at the bottom of the hill but also serves as a direct connection to pre-Sufi Hindu cultural roots of the region in that it recalls local hagiographic narratives about one of the twelfth-century founding figures of Devgiri, Hemādrī. Janārdana's *samādhi* marker in the highest cave at the pinnacle of the original Devgiri fortress draws obvious parallels between his career as *killedāra*, administrator to the Sultan, and a realized brahmin sage and the career of Hemādrī as a cave-dwelling *yogin* on the same mountain who became the genius administrator of the Yadava kingdom.[442] Thus, Janārdana's *samādhi* marker fits the protocol of his own Hindu religiocultural tradition. Both of these two tomb-shrine expressions—Hindu *samādhi* marker and Sufi *dargāh*—can therefore be seen as contributing to the cross-traditional flow of lineage transmission.

It is in this context that we must consider Eknāth's rediscovery of Jñāneśvar's *samādhi* site and subsequent shrine development. With the successful establishment of the Sufi *dargāh* tradition in the Deccan, it appears to have directly influenced the local Hindu *samādhi* burial tradition, which was ripe for a shift towards full-fledged shrine worship due to the swelling devotional element of the Vārkarī *bhakti* tradition. It is at this time that Eknāth rediscovers Jñāneśvar's *samādhi* site and the process of ritual shrine worship begins in Āḷandī. Nevertheless, while the worship tradition of the Sufi *dargāh* may very well have been the spark that triggered the shift from

[441] See for example Tulpule 1979: 363-64; Burman 2001; 2002; Skyhawk 1993a; Skyhawk/Duncan 1997: 410-11.

[442] Green 2012a: 246-47, 251-52.

samādhi burial to *samādhi* shrine worship, it did not dictate the expression of that worship. As we will see in the following chapter, in Āḷandī the structural and ritual expressions of *samādhi* shrine worship reflect the very philosophical ground on which Jñāneśvar built his teachings—teachings that reflect his Nāth background and his nondual stance, which are both undeniably Hindu.

Historical Development of Āḷandī

The temple structure is purported to have been built by Ambekar Deśpaṇḍe in the late sixteenth century coinciding with the period of Eknāth's visit.[443] The practice of carrying Jñāneśvar's *pādukā*s (sandals) on pilgrimage from the *samādhi* site in Āḷandī to Paṇḍharpur can be dated to at least the early seventeenth century as revealed by donation records published in a 1925 publication of the *Śivacaritrapradīpa*.[444] Land grants for the support of the temple were issued beginning in the seventeenth century by Śivājī (r. 1674-1680), Śambhu Raje (r. 1680-89), and Rajaram Raje (r. 1689-1700). In the eighteenth century, the Peśvas gifted the village of Āḷandī to Jñāneśvar himself, and the revenue records show continued royal donations being made to the temple by the Peśva court in Pune, including lists of expenditures sanctioned for Jñāneśvar's *samādhi* shrine.[445] These records also speak of the purported land grants

[443] I have found several later references citing Ambekar Deśpaṇḍe as responcible for a sixteenth century temple structure. However, I remain in continued search for documentation to verify this claim.

[444] Apte 1925: 86. Cited in Tulpule 1979: 327.

[445] See for example Sardesai 1933: 119-20, which containes an expenditure list dated November 7, 1756.

made by Śivājī to a local Paṭīl for the purpose of supporting the *samādhi* shrine.[446] The eastern and southern walls of the compound were built by one of Deśpaṇḍe's descendants in 1725. The western wall was commissioned by the Peśva ruler Balaji Baji Rao in 1750, and the large stone *maṇḍapa* was built by Ramchandra Malhar in 1760.[447] Also in 1760, Peśva Balaji Baji Rao created a budget for the management, worship, and administration of the annual revenue. By this time, hereditary worship rights for the temple had been ascribed to the Guravs, a *pūjārī* caste who also go by the name Waghmare. A Christian missionary text from 1835 marks the earliest colonial encounter with the site and contains excerpts from an 1832 letter describing an earlier visit by a colleague of the author. It notes the existence of the silver mask of Jñāneśvar in his sanctum, along with images of Viṭṭhal and Rukmiṇī on the back wall and also mentions that devotees regard Jñāneśvar as an *āvatara* of Śiva.[448] The main gateway and balcony of the north wall were built with funds provided by someone connected to the Sindia royal dynasty of Gwalior.[449]

In 1852 the British colonial government in Bombay created the Śrī Jñāneśvar Mahārāj Saṃsthān Committee, a temple trust consisting of six people. This committee was responsible for overseeing the temple in accordance with tradition and practice as well as administering village revenue under the control and sanction of the

[446] Sardesai 1933: 132-33.
[447] Gazetteer 1885: 102-03.
[448] Mitchell 1836: 46.
[449] Gazetteer 1885: 103.

Pune Controller.[450] A list of all subsequent trustees is inscribed on the inside of the northern wall of the compound, just outside the trustees' offices.[451] By 1864 the committee was free to act without government supervision, and the Municipal Corporation of Āḷandī was established in the year 1867.

The Gurav *pūjārī*s held their positions as hereditary worshipers until 1911 when they fell into conflict with the temple committee due to ownership claims of the *samādhi* compound, which the trustees rejected sighting that the Guravs were merely hereditary servants of the temple. The *pūjārī*s were forcibly dismissed by the temple trustees who then assigned six brahmins to perform the services of the temple.[452] In 1948, the Mumbai High Court of the independent nation of India reaffirmed the committee's responsibilities by forming the Śrī Jñāneśvar Mahārāj Saṃsthān Committee Charitable Trust. Since then the committee is answerable to the High Court Scheme Chief District and Sessions Judge of Pune and must report in transparency all revenue activities of the temple.[453]

Although the origins of the worship tradition that developed around Jñāneśvar are somewhat murky, from at least the late sixteenth century the living tradition's

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[450] Balkrishna Savalram Pujari and Others vs Shree Dnyaneshwar Maharaj Sansthan and Others, March 26, 1959. Citation: 1959 AIR 798, 1959 SCR Supl. (2) 476.

[451] Personal observation, June 2009.

[452] Balkrishna Savalram Pujari and Others vs Shree Dnyaneshwar Maharaj Sansthan and Others, March 26, 1959. Citation: 1959 AIR 798, 1959 SCR Supl. (2) 476.

[453] Temple trust correspondace, February 2011. I have been able to verify the existence of this overall narrative of temple development as far back as the Peśva rulers in the 1730s through court *daftar*s, temple documents and colonial records. I hope to verify the inams issued by Śivaji and the other Maratha rulers during subsequent research visits to India.

encounter with the *samādhi* shrine space in Āḷandī is predicated on the memory projecting back to a purported event in the late thirteenth century. In this regard, I follow Novetzke's pivot between memory and history *ala* Pierre Nora. In reference to history, Novetzke states, "Memory, by contrast, gives time back; it restores the connection severed by the lapse of time and returns the observer to the immediacy of an event."[454] The immediacy of Jñāneśvar's *saṃjīvan samādhi* triggered by the memory held in the awareness of his devotees is palpable some seven hundred years later, for it is this event that establishes the living presence of Jñāneśvar in the space, and it is the ongoing remembrance of his continuing presence there that is the real core of this sacred space to the present day. As we will see in the next chapter, the encounter with the perceived presence of Jñāneśvar in his *samādhi* in Āḷandī governs the ritual activity in and the physical development of the space over time.

[454] Novetzke 2009: 73.

CHAPTER 6
Guru as *Mūrti*, Tomb as Temple

Indeed, there seems to be substantial crossover between these two traditions—the Sufi *dargāh* tradition and the Hindu *samādhi* shrine tradition. Indian communities are filled with stories of the Hindu saint whose *guru* was a Sufi or the Sufi saint who received initiation from a Hindu *guru*. Given this, it is not uncommon to see Hindus visiting a Sufi *dargāh* or Muslims visiting a Hindu *samādhi* shrine.[455] More specifically, the Nāth Yogi tradition, through which Jñāneśvar traces his own lineage, has a long history of mingling with the Sufi community. In the region around Āḷandī there are *dargāh*s to Sufi saints whose *guru*s were from the Hindu Vārkarī tradition as well as Vārkarī *poet-saints* who purportedly had Sufi masters as their *guru*s.

Although the act of engagement by the devotee with the entombed body of either the Hindu *satguru* or the Sufi *pīr* may appear similar, there is one critical difference, and that concerns the two traditions' understandings of the nature of the saints who are being venerated. I will argue that it is this understanding that allows for the *samādhi* shrine of a Hindu saint such as Jñāneśvar to be treated as if it were a temple housing the very form of the formless absolute.

[455] See Bigelow 2010.

While the Sufi saint is seen to be a close friend of God and an intermediary on the behalf of his devotees, the realized *guru* in a Hindu tradition such as Jñāneśvar's is understood to be a localized embodiment of absolute consciousness itself. Charles White remarks, "In thinking about the situation in Hinduism, one observes that here the line grows indistinct at times between the gods and the saints. In the measure that the cult theory allows, most saints are considered to be divine and often receive public worship in the manner of divinities."[456] In speaking of the enlightened *guru*, the *Kaulajñānanirṇaya* proclaims, "He is Śiva!"[457] Paul Muller-Ortega points out that, according to the Kashmir Śaiva authority Abhinavagupta, the body of the realized *yogin* can be understood as the reflection of absolute consciousness itself.

> Every activity of the enlightened yogin is a *mudrā*: a "gesture" or "sign" that reveals the shape and character of the absolute consciousness that is invisibly impressing itself into the receptive yogin's being. . . .
>
> [T]he mind, breath, body, and demeanor of the yogin are all shaped by the overwhelming impact of the potency of the absolute. It . . . molds the yogin into its own design; it "seals" its imprint on the being of the yogin. In this way, though transcendent, invisible, and beyond the reach of the senses, the Absolute nevertheless, by means of the force . . . of its descent into the individuality of the practitioner, reveals its nature in the transformation of the state of the realized yogin.[458]

In speaking of the state of a realized sage, Jñāneśvar himself asserts, "Thus he becomes the embodiment of the state of the Absolute, which is the source of all

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[456] White 1974: 306-322.

[457] *Kaulajñānanirṇaya* 17.37.

[458] Muller-Ortega 2000: 581.

activity, and is truly the very form of the Formless."[459] Furthermore, it is clear that Jñāneśvar viewed his own *guru*, Nivṛttināth, in this way, for his own works are overflowing with devotional praises to his *guru*, whom he celebrates as the absolute Godhead. Here is an example:

> Paying homage to Shri Nivrittinatha, I bow to Him who is the spring to the garden of spiritual endeavours, an auspicious thread of Divine Command and though formless the very incarnation of compassion.
>
> Though manifest he is not seen. He is light and yet does not illuminate. He exists and yet is nowhere.
>
> The [Absolute] does not proceed towards Himself. How can he recede also? However he does not give up the illusory screen of his name (Nivrittinatha).[460]

Moreover, in the perspective of Jñāneśvar and his followers, the realized *guru* is the key to the disciple's own transcendence. Being in the presence of a realized *guru* is sought after above all else, for such a person is held to have the ability to trigger the same transformation in those who come to him. Indeed, the Mahābhārata declares that the true *guru* is the one who bestows immortality.[461] This is the real reason for seeking a *guru*—not merely for the sake of supreme knowledge, but for the direct experiential realization of that supreme knowledge. Bettina Baumer states, "It is an unwritten belief that God cannot be experienced without the help of someone who has experienced him. This forms the oft-quoted saying of the mystic poet Kabir,

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[459] *Jñāneśvarī* 6.468.

[460] *Amṛtanubhāva* 2.1, 26, 32.

[461] Mahābhārata 5.52.44.5. On the role of the *guru* in the northern *Sant* tradition, see Gold 1987, especially 173-199. For a discription by the twentieth century adept Gopinath Kaviraj of the process by which the *guru* is able to influence and guide his disciple, see White 2009: 165-66.

namely that, were he to meet his guru and God at the same time, he would first bow to the guru, for it is through him that he reaches God."[462] The one Kashmiri text we are certain Jñāneśvar was familiar with, the *Śiva Sūtras* of Vasugupta, summarizes its perspective on the role of the *guru* in one singular phrase, "*gurur upāyaḥ*," ("the *guru* is the way").[463] This understanding of the *guru* as the means to ones liberation is also echoed in the *Siddhasiddhāntapaddhati*.[464] The *Kaulajñānanirṇaya* proclaims, "Clearly such a liberated one may free another. . . . He is Paramātmā [the supreme self] by touching him one becomes liberated of this there is no doubt. Dear One! Instructed by him one becomes free."[465] Baumer paraphrases the perspective of Kṣemarāja, the acclaimed disciple of Abhinavagupta, regarding the liberating power of the *guru*:

> He is the one who knows all the principles of reality as they really are, he is equal to Śiva, and he manifests the power of the *mantra*. Any human being whom he touches, addresses or looks at is liberated from all sins… Those who are initiated by him are guided by Śiva himself, they attain the fulfillment of their innermost desires and the ultimate state. The guru is ever established in union with the Divine . . .[466]

Returning to Jñāneśvar, he offers extended praises of his own *guru*'s power to dispel the darkness of ignorance and catalyze the awakening of his disciples.

> Hail to the Guru, the resplendent sun which has risen, dispelling the illusion of the universe and causing the lotus of non-duality to unfold its petals.

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[462] Baumer 1990: 348.

[463] *Śiva Sūtras* 2.6.

[464] *Siddhasiddhāntapaddhati* 5.6.

[465] *Kaulajñānanirṇaya* 17.37-39.

[466] Baumer 1990: 347.

> He swallows up the night of ignorance, removes the illusion of knowledge and ignorance, and brings in the day of enlightenment for the wise. . . .
>
> His glory gives perpetual light to the experience of the highest bliss of a liberated being.
>
> When this great sovereign of the sky rises forever, the cycle of rising and setting disappears along with the four quarters of the earth.
>
> Both appearances and disappearances vanish; and God, who was concealed beneath outer forms, is revealed. What more is there to say? This dawn is beyond description. . . .
>
> To Nivritti, who is that sun of Consciousness, I bow again and again. There are no words which can express his praises.[467]

Hindu perspectives on the special status of a realized *guru* thus present a radically different understanding of the relationship between God and saint than that found in the Sufi tradition, and I would argue that it is such perspectives that allow for the entombed body of a sage such as Jñāneśvar to be treated as a *mūrti*, a localized embodiment of absolute consciousness, and the shrine to function as a temple. In this context the *Tirumantiram* instructs the devotee to mark the spot of the buried body of a realized sage with his sandals and an image in his likeness and to perform the same rituals as those offered to the deity in a temple.[468]

Thus, it is the very ontological status ascribed to the realized *guru* that allows for the particular manner in which a *guru* such as Jñāneśvar is worshiped in his *samādhi* shrine as a special kind of *mūrti*. We will now turn our attention to

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[467] *Jñāneśvarī*. 16.1-2, 13-17.

[468] *Tirumantiram* 7.19.1919-22.

Jñāneśvar's shrine compound itself and will examine the manner in which the devotees' relationship with the perceived presence of Jñāneśvar in his *samādhi* shrine, as a localized form of the formless absolute, impacts the development of, and encounter with, the space over time. In so doing, we will come to understand the tomb as a special kind of temple.

Jñāneśvar as *Mūrti*

As discussed in the Chapter 4, according to certain Hindu traditions, when a realized sage leaves his body, he does not die in the usual sense. The process of transmigration ceases in that he has no more *karma* left that would propel him to be reborn again. Instead, the realized sage becomes absorbed into the totality of the absolute, and all vestiges of atomistic personal identity cease.[469] This state is termed *mahāsamādhi,* or the great absorption, in which death has been conquered. The sacred power of the realized sage, and of the realized *guru* more specifically, is said to radiate from the body even after he or she has left it. Additionally, all the spiritual merit accumulated by the *guru* due to his compassionate activities in the world is said to stay with the body and is for the benefit of others.[470] It is for this reason that the body is buried, and the space of burial becomes a shrine to which devotees come in order to immerse themselves in the sacred power radiating from the body and to receive blessings from the accrued merit of the realized *guru*, similar to the function of *baraka* in the Sufi *dargāh* tradition.

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[469] See for example *Siddhasiddhāntapaddhati* 5.53-54, 73, 78-79.

[470] Muktananda 1998: 114-15.

Jñāneśvar repeatedly praised the state of the *satguru*, and swooned with one-pointed devotion for his own *guru*, Nivṛttināth. In the *Jñāneśvarī*, his famed commentary on the Bhagavad Gītā, verse upon verse is dedicated to extolling the virtues of the perfected state of the realized *guru*. For him the *guru* is the localized embodiment of the absolute Godhead—the very form of the formless. Jñāneśvar's own state of realization is seen by his devotees as no different from that of his *guru*'s, and thus Jñāneśvar's body has been revered since his death as the very manifestation of absolute consciousness. In Mahīpati's *Bhaktavījaya*, the celebrated eighteenth-century hagiographical account of the principal Maharashtrian poet-saints, he narrates Nāmdev's first meeting with Jñāneśvar, "My good deeds in a former birth have come to their fruitage. I have met Pandurang [Kṛṣṇa] in visible form. In order to save those who are entangled in the deeds of this earthly life, and those ignorant men intoxicated by the seductions of this life, you, O Swami [Jñāneśvar], have become an avatar.' Saying this he [Nāmdev] again prostrated himself on the ground before him [Jñāneśvar]."[471]

The most revered scripture of the Vārkarī tradition is Jñāneśvar's commentary on the Bhagavad Gītā, the *Jñāneśvarī*, which, as one of the first major works in the vernacular Marathi language, is accessible to the common people. This text is coveted by Vārkarī devotees as the root text of the tradition. It is chanted, read, and studied as a central devotional practice. As such, devotees have a clear understanding of the role

[471] *Bhaktavijaya* 10.13-14. See *Bhaktavijaya* 1988: v. 1, 159.

of the *guru* from Jñāneśvar's perspective. They witness his reverence for his own *guru* in verses such as:

> I have built a temple of the meaning of the *Gita*, with a pinnacle as high as Mount Meru. Within it I worship the image of my Guru.[472]

Moreover, they infer from other verses that Jñāneśvar is to be understood as no different from Nivṛttināth, who was his brother as well as his *guru*.

> As the reflection vanishes along with the relative objectivity of the original object, so the personality of [the] one who salutes [i.e., the disciple] is taken away by [the *guru*] along with [the *guru*'s] own state of being an object of respect. . . .
>
> Therefore, the words master and disciple mean but one Reality and the master alone lives in both the forms.[473]

Through relishing such verses, Jñāneśvar's devotees come to appreciate and anticipate their own eventual mergence with their *guru* in the state of God-realization. During my field research, in Maharashtra, I met a 94-year-old man, a lifetime devotee of Jñāneśvar. He asked me, "Tell me, what is in Āḷandī?" Before I could answer, he barked, "All and I! Āḷ-and-ī, All and I!" For this elderly devotee, the "All" refers to the state of absolute consciousness embodied by Jñāneśvar and the "I" to his eventual union with that absolute Godhead through the grace of his *guru*. This 94-year-old man has childhood memories from the 1920s of playing in the *samādhi* compound of Jñāneśvar. His father was a trustee from 1931 to 1951. When he got older, he himself became a trustee for ten years. After his wife died in the late 1970s, he walked for

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[472] *Jñāneśvarī* 18.1760. All translations of *Jñāneśvarī* are taken from Kripananda 1989, unless otherwise noted.

[473] *Amṛtānubhāva* 2.49, 61. All translations of *Amṛtānubhāva* are taken from Bahirat 1956.

five hours from his home in Pune to Jñāneśvar's *samādhi* shrine in Āḷandī, a distance of fifteen miles in the hot Indian sun. He repeated this walk every month for the next twenty years. When his body became too old for the trek, he spent an additional ten years making the pilgrimage by car. When I met him at his home in 2011, he told me that since his body had become too frail, he only planned to go to Āḷandī one more time. He would go one more time to see his *guru*, and, at his insistence, I was to go with him. Once at the shrine, I stood behind this man as he took what very well may have been his last *darśan* of his *guru*'s sandals—this 94-year-old man who had spent his entire life devoted to this "lord of knowledge" (Jñāna-īśvara). I watched him weep, his whole body trembling and heaving as he surrendered his weight onto the sandals and the pedestal holding them. Later he said to me with joyful exuberance, "I was weeping tears of joy, tears of pure joy, out of supreme gratitude!"[474]

Mother

Jñāneśvar is celebrated by his Vārkarī devotees as a realized saint who is eternally established in the absolute and is the conduit for their own transformation. As such, he is viewed as the source of all, and like Viṭṭhal, is affectionately referred to in the feminine as "Mother"—Jñānobāī Māulī, Mother Jñāneśvar. This notion of Jñāneśvar as Mother begins with his own declaration of his *guru* as Mother. Jñāneśvar reveres the absolute as Mother, and since his *guru* is a manifestation of the absolute, his *guru* is also Mother.[475]

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[474] Personal communication with Anant Jośi, former Trustee for Śrī Jñāneśvar Mahārāj Samādhi Trust and life-long Jñāneśvar devotee, Pune, March 5, 2011.

[475] Dhere 2011: 207.

In the summer of 2009, while studying Marathi in Pune, I witnessed the Vārkarīs come through town on their annual pilgrimage to Paṇḍharpur. The main thoroughfare through the city was shut down, and all the residents came out to celebrate their journey. With video camera in hand, I focused in on a particular *diṇḍī* (chanting group) as they moved down the street. Upon seeing me and my camera, they immediately began to pogo and clang their small cymbals. The leader bellowed, "JÑĀNOBĀĪ!" And the rest answered, "MĀULĪ!" Again, "JÑĀNOBĀĪ!" . . . "MĀULĪ!" . . . "JÑĀNOBĀĪ!" . . . "MĀULĪ!" . . . "JÑĀNOBĀĪ!" . . . "MĀULĪ!" All of them pogoed in time until they slowly settled down, huddled together, and lay down with their backs on the ground and supported their leader, who had surrendered his body to them and was floating on their arms, all the while still chanting, "JÑĀNOBĀĪ!" . . . " MĀULĪ!" . . . "JÑĀNOBĀĪ!" . . . "MĀULĪ!" Faster and faster and faster! Then suddenly they stopped, bounced up to their feet with joyful smiles, and headed off down the road.[476]

The Vārkarīs revere the absolute as Mother, and thus they celebrate Viṭṭhal, the absolute Godhead, as Mother. They see the absolute manifested in the form of Jñāneśvar, and so they call him Mother. Moreover, in accord with Jñāneśvar's nondual perspective, the Vārkarīs also revere the absolute in the form of each and every human being. During the heat of the day, worshipers often come to sit in the center *maṇḍapa* of Jñāneśvar's *samādhi* compound for meditation. I myself would periodically take a break from my field research in the heat of the day and would go

[476] Personal observation, June, 2009.

and sit on the cool marble floor of this small hall. I found it useful to simply close my eyes and still myself for a while. One day, as I sat there, settling into my own internal silence, I heard someone shuffling through the hall and every so often muttering, "*māulī*." Eventually, as this shuffling worked its way closer to me, I suddenly felt someone touch my feet and in a clear voice utter, "*māulī*." I opened my eyes to see an old man hunched over, but he was already turning and moving away from me. I watched as he slowly visited each person meditating in the hall, humbly touched their feet, and said, "*māulī*." He never once looked at anyone, only their feet, and moved on in a very respectful yet matter-of-fact manner. It struck me that this man was an expression of the profound simplicity of Jñāneśvar's theology in practice: in this vast ocean of multiplicity, there is differentiation but no difference.[477]

Architectural Configuration

The spatial orientation of the village of Āḷandī[478] revolves around Jñāneśvar's *samādhi* compound, which is quite modest in comparison to our two earlier case studies—the Viṭṭhal Temple in Paṇḍharpur and the Mīnākṣī-Sundareśvara Temple in Madurai. However small this compound is in comparison, it is nevertheless deeply layered with the history of devotees' encounters with the continuing presence of Jñāneśvar in the space. The compound is set off from the village by a wall circumscribing an area approximately one town-block in size. The main entrance to

[477] This philosophical paradox of difference in non-difference (*bhedābheda*) as understood from Jñāneśvar's nondual perspective is expressed in verses such as *Anubhavāmṛta* 11.28, "The non-dual one enters of his own accord the courtyard of duality. And the unitly deepens along with the growth of difference."

[478] Also known at various times in its existence as Āḷaṅkāvatī, or Āḷaṅkapūr

the compound is through a large gateway in the center of the northern wall (see Figures 29 & 30). Along the north-south axis of this gate is situated a series of three consecutively smaller *maṇḍapa*s, culminating in the *garbhagṛha* of Jñāneśvar's *samādhi* marker, which sits just south of the center of the compound on this axis. Directly below this marker is held to be the meditating body of Jñāneśvar. This is the hub of the compound. Surmounting the small *garbhagṛha*, inside of which sits the *samādhi* marker, is a classic temple *śikhara*. (see Figure 31). Immediately west of this structure is the somewhat smaller Śiva shrine of Siddheśvara (Lord of *siddha*s), in which is established a small, black stone Śiva *liṅga* (see Figure 32). Between these two structures rests a black stone Nandī, his gaze ever focused on the *liṅga* of Siddheśvara, awaiting his master's command (see Figure 33). The northern wall of Siddheśvara's shrine forms the boundary of one side of a raised enclosure, inside of which grows a tree (see Figure 34). Along the eastern end of this enclosure is a wall with a long textual inscription of the *Jñāneśvarī* inscribed on it (see Figure 35). This wall marks the western side of the central *maṇḍapa* in front of the *samādhi* shrine. Extending from the eastern end of this *maṇḍapa* is a hall with a Disneyland-style *darśan* cue. Immediately off the eastern end of the *samādhi* sanctum is a small Gaṇeśa shrine, as well as a small room for ritual items and a bedchamber for Jñāneśvar. On the other side of these structures, further to the east, are two small shrines to Viṭṭhal and Rukmiṇī, respectively. Off the back (southern end) of the *samādhi* sanctum is a covered porch with a small shrine dedicated to Muktābāī, Jñāneśvar's sister (see Figure 36).

Between this conglomeration of structures and the surrounding wall of the complex runs a *prākāra*. Along this *prākāra* are situated three additional trees—a papal tree to the immediate right after passing through the main gateway (see Figure 37), another tree to the left and slightly around the corner towards the Viṭṭhal and Rukmiṇī temples (see Figure 38), and a third tree located along the *prākāra* in the far southwest corner of the compound, just outside Siddheśvara's shrine (see Figure 39). Running along the inside perimeter wall of the compound is a series of administrative rooms, which include offices for the trustees, the kitchen, storage rooms, and a bookstore. In the northeastern corner of the complex is a fountain with running water for the cleansing of the devotees' feet and hands prior to worship (see Figure 40). In addition to the main northern entrance, there are three other small gateways into the compound. Two of them are along the eastern wall—one just next to the fountain and the other closer towards the middle of the eastern wall. The remaining gateway is located in the center of the western wall. Just off this western gateway is a stairway that runs down to a subterranean meditation room, which is said to sit directly across from the meditating body of Jñāneśvar.[479]

Since Jñāneśvar is believed to have entered his *samādhi* cavern by way of a tunnel dug under the *mūrti* of Nandī, Ranade postulates that he must be sitting facing Siddheśvara, which would place him in a westward facing direction, a direction that Ranade points out is counter to Jñāneśvar's own suggestion that a realized sage

[479] While in the past, it was possible to access this room for meditation, on my last visit to Āḷandī it was being used as a storeroom while various areas of the compound went through some needed renovation, and thus it was closed indefinitely.

should leave his body while facing north.[480] However, the main access of the whole compound runs north to south from the main entrance gate to the door of the *samādhi*'s sanctum. Thus, as one moves through the gate towards Jñāneśvar, one is moving in a southward direction. Since it is customary to approach the deity of a temple face-to-face, it is likely that Jñāneśvar is indeed facing north and thus able to greet his approaching visitors.

Āḷandī in Jñāneśvar's Life and *Samādhi*

The sacred power ascribed to the site where Jñāneśvar is entombed predates his *samādhi*. It even predates his birth.[481] The Śiva shrine of Siddheśvara, a form of Śiva particularly favored by the Siddha and Nāth traditions, was already established in the village.[482] Nāmdev narrates several accounts of Jñāneśvar's father visiting the shrine to receive Siddheśvara's *darśan*, both with Jñāneśvar's mother, Rakhumabāī, a native of Āḷandī, and with his grandfather, Siddhopant, who had also been initiated into the Nāth lineage by Gahiṇināth.[483] Although Viṭṭhalpant married Rakhumabāī, he had always had a longing to pursue liberation. Thus, at a certain point, he abandoned his wife and traveled to Vārānasī where he took the vows of a *saṃnyāsin* under the guidance of a *guru* in the Rāmānanda order.[484]

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[480] Ranade 2003: 35

[481] For the biographical narrative of Jñāneśvar, see Nāmdev Gāthā 671-696.

[482] On Siddheśvar temples and the Siddha and Nāth traditions, see White 1996: 60, 95-96, 103, 110.

[483] *Nāmdeva Gāthā* 671-673.

[484] Ranade mentions that there is descrepincy among hgiographers as to which Rāmānanda School he belonged. Nābhāji and Mahīpati argue that he was part of the

When Vitthalpant left Rakhumabāī to take *saṃnyāsa*, it is to the pipal tree in the Siddheśvara compound that she went in order to perform austerities by means of *pradakṣiṇa* (circumambulation). Hagiographical accounts speak of her completing 100,008 *pradakṣiṇa*s around the tree, and it is at this tree during one of her austerity sessions that she met a *sādhu* who turned out to be her husband's *guru*. He blessed her to have several children, to which she laughed, given her predicament. When he inquired as to the reason for this reaction, she explained that her husband had abandoned her to become a *saṃnyāsin*. The *guru* intuited immediately who her husband was and assured her that his blessing would bear fruit in the form of four great *siddha*s. Thus the prediction and blessing concerning Rakhumabāī's four future children is held to have taken place where Jñāneśvar's *samādhi* shrine would later be established. In this way, both the coming and the going of Jñāneśvar take place in relation to this Śiva temple compound.

The *guru* sent Viṭṭhalpant back to his wife with the instruction that he must fulfill his duty as a householder, yet the other brahmins, knowing that he had broken his vow of *saṃnyāsa*, rejected him and relegated his family to outcaste status. Rakhumabāī did indeed in time have four children, three boys and a girl: Nivṛtti, Jñāneśvar, Sopāṇ, and Muktābāī. Although shunned by society and raised in poverty, they all proved to be great spiritual adepts.[485] Gahiṇināth's initiation of Nivṛtti into the Nāth tradition is said to have occured in a cave on Brahmagiri Mountain near

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Ānanda School, while Nāmdev and Niḷoba claim it was the Āśrama School. See Ranade 2003: 80.

[485] *Nāmadeva Gāthā* 1990: 184-193

Tyambakeśvar while Nivṛtti was still a boy. Nivṛtti then initiated his three siblings in turn, beginning with Jñāneśvar. After the death of their parents, the four children traveled to Paiṭhaṇ,[486] the seat of brahmanical authority in medieval Maharashtra, in order to pitition their reinstatement to the caste by way of the *upanāyana* initiation ceremony. On their return, they stopped over in the village of Nevāse. It was here that Jñāneśvar is said to have composed his *Jñāneśvarī*, the poetic commentary on the Bhagavad Gītā in Marathi.

In their childhood the siblings spent much time in Āḷandī, frequenting the Siddheśvara Shrine, and when Jñāneśvar decided it was time to leave the body, it was to Āḷandī that he wished to go in order to enter into *samādhi* in the presence of Siddheśvara.[487] After returning from traveling on pilgrimage in the north with Nāmdev—the tales of which are told in Nāmdev's *Tīrthāvalī*—Jñāneśvar is said to have expressed his desire to take *saṃjīvan samādhi* at the Siddheśvara temple in Āḷandī. The occasion—as recounted in Nāmdev's third and last volume on Jñāneśvar's life, entitled *Samādhi*—was celebratory and filled with days of *bhajan* chanting. He was surrounded by his brothers, sister, and dear friends, which included all the other great Vārkarīs poet-saints of the period. Nāmdev's sons prepared the *samādhi* cavern as well as Jñāneśvar's meditation seat. Jñāneśvar himself gave a philosophical discourse, and the evening before he was to take *samādhi* there was a huge *bhaṇḍārā* (feast) followed by more *bhajan* chanting throughout the night and

[486] Ancient Pratiṣṭhāna, sometimes referred to as Piṣṭhāpūram.

[487] *Nāmdeva Gāthā* 700-830.

into the early morning hours. The next day, ecstatic and exhausted by a full night of chanting, the time had come. It was the thirteenth day of the dark half of the month of Kārtik (October-November) in 1296.

The remembrance of the moment when Jñāneśvar entered into *samādhi* tugs at the heartstrings of his Maharashtrian devotees, as was vividly conveyed to me one evening at a home in Varai on the outskirts of Mumbai.[488] A *bhajan* session had spontaneously broken out, and while one of Nāmdev's Jñāneśvar *samādhi abhaṅga*s was being sung, it was simultaneously interpreted for me.

> With folded hands Jñānobāī is walking to Nivṛtti. He says, "You have treated me like a small child (given me everything). I have crossed the *bhāvasāgara* thanks to you. Whatever I am, you made me." Nivṛtti, with tears in his eyes, grabs Jñāneśvar's cheek and says, "You have done so much for us." Nāmdev (who is watching) says, "It is so hard to watch this. Jñāneśvar has now merged into Brahman."[489]

Tears swelled in the eyes of the singers, while joyful smiles played across their faces as they swooned in the poetic beauty of the memory of a seven-hundred-year-old moment they were now hearing recounted.

As Nāmdev's eye-witness account continues, Jñāneśvar turned from Nivṛtti, his brother and *guru*, to enter the *samādhi* cavern and planted his staff in the ground

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[488] This family had invited a number of people over to have *darśan* of the *pādukā*s of a renowned nineteenth-century Maharashtrian *siddha* popularly known as Swami Samartha, who in 1878 had taken *mahāsamādhi* in Akkaḷkoṭ, a rural village just across the eastern border of Maharashtra in the state of Karnataka. He purportedly left a pair of his *pādukā*s with the family on whose land he had chosen as the site to leave his body. This family became the caretakers of his *samādhi* shrine, and they have dedicated themselves to touring the state often with his *pādukā*s so that his devotees can have his *darśaṇ*.

[489] Anonymous personal communication, Varai, August 19, 2009.

next to the entrance, where it immediately took root. Jñāneśvar took his seat, placing a copy of the *Jñāneśvarī* at his feet. Nivṛtti then sealed the entrance and marked the spot with a stone. It was done.[490]

Tale of a Tree

We learn from Nāmdev's narrative that the *samādhi* space in Āḷandī originally contained a pre-existing Śiva shrine, Nandī, and pipal tree. With the self-entombment of Jñāneśvar, the site of his *samādhi* was marked by a stone as well as the rooted staff at its entrance. As Novetzke points out, we also have a text, Nāmdev's *Samādhi*, which is orally recited and narrates as well as celebrates the event.[491] This text establishes a practice of annual remembrance and enactment of the celebratory days leading up to the *samādhi*. But as we have seen, there is no evidence of shrine worship let alone a shrine structure in Nāmdev's narrative.

Although Jñāneśvar's act of taking *samādhi* is the seminal event, which establishes his presence in the space, the most definitive spatial relationship of the site is not established until Eknāth's visit in the late sixteenth century. This purported event some 300 years after Jñāneśvar's self-willed *samādhi* defines the spatial relationship that we see today in the temple compound between devotees and Jñāneśvar. It is an event that influenced not only the physical development of the space over time but also one's movement through it.

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[490] See *Nāmadeva Gāthā* 1990: 193-243.

[491] Novetzke 2009: 218-221.

This acclaimed event is invoked by the Vārkarī tradition to explain the recovery of Jñāneśvar's renowned Marathi commentary on the Bhagavad Gītā, the *Jñāneśvarī*, which by the sixteenth century had become corrupted by successive interpolations. Eknāth, the next major figure in the Vārkarī tradition after Nāmdev, is credited with purging the later interpolation from the commentary and producing a critical edition of the original Jñāneśvar verses.[492] Although Eknāth and Jñāneśvar were separated from each other by nearly three hundred years, the hagiographic narratives speak of a purported encounter between them, which serves to illustrate how the space of Jñāneśvar's *samādhi* shrine has influenced the tradition and at the same time how the tradition understands the dynamic, living quality of the space. According to one hagiographic account, one night Eknāth had a dream in which Jñāneśvar came to him and told him that he was choking. Convinced of the urgency of the matter, Eknāth went to Āḷandī, which at that time had become somewhat overrun by jungle. Eknāth is said to have meditated there under a tree near a ruined, partially submerged Śiva shrine on the banks of the Indrayānī River. He was then guided by Jñāneśvar in his meditation to the spot of the *samādhi*. Opening his eyes, his gaze fell upon a small hillock above the Śiva shrine with a tree and a stone marking the site of Jñāneśvar's *samādhi*. He entered the cavern and there he found Jñāneśvar seated in meditation, as young and alive as the day that he had entered the cavern nearly three hundred years before, yet now his physical body consisted of a

[492] *Eknāth Caritra* 16.69-77; *Bhaktalilāmṛta* 19.120-129. See also Keune 2011: 212, n. 103; Tulpule 1979: 359.

self-luminous light. Around his neck was a large root from the tree above, embracing him in a stranglehold. Eknāth removed the root from constricting the radiant body of the young *guru*. Before leaving the tomb, he found the copy of the *Jñāneśvarī* at the feet of the entombed Jñāneśvar. Eknāth took the copy with him, and in this way, according to the narrative, the uncorrupted version of the *Jñāneśvarī* reemerged in the sixteenth century.[493] To this day one of the main practices performed at Jñāneśvar's *samādhi* shrine is the chanting of his Gītā commentary, and the place to chant it is around the tree whose roots had led to the great recovery (see Figures 34, 35, and 41). The sacred status ascribed to this tree is further enhanced by the traditional belief that it sprang from the very staff that Jñāneśvar himself planted in the ground as he entered the cavern. This tree is celebrated as the *ajana-vṛkṣa*, unborn tree.

This narrative illustrates how the tradition recognizes the living presence of Jñāneśvar in the space, and how his living presence in the space influences and shapes the rituals of the tradition. This narrative, carried in the awareness of the devotee when he or she encounters the tree during recitation of the *Jñāneśvarī*, the sacred text of the tradition, has a deep influence on the meanings that the space holds for the devotee. In this way, the devotee is a participant in the space, not a spectator of it, and it is this participation that continually inscribes layers of meaning in the space for the devotee. One takes *darśan* of the tree—this tree planted by Jñāneśvar,

[493] This hagiographic account was narrated to me by Jñāneśvar *bhakta*s while visiting Jñāneśvar's *samādhi* shrine compound in February 2001. Another version has Eknāth sit in conversation with Jñāneśvar about the text from which he gains the internal knowledge to distinquish the original verses from the interpolated ones.

this tree that embraced Jñāneśvar, this tree whose roots Eknāth removed from Jñāneśvar. This tree is the conduit to these events and to these revered poet-saints of the Vārkarī tradition. As Novetzke points out, the tree connects the past *to* and *in* the present.[494] When one participates in the rituals of the space, one is connected to the past experiences that have taken place in the space and to the great sages who participated in those experiences.

Movement through the Space

The devotee's movement through the space of Jñāneśvar's *Samādhi* compound begins first by performing a full *pradakṣiṇa* of the compound by way of its *prākāra*. Then one goes to receive Jñāneśvar's *darśan* in his *garbhagṛha*. From there the movement flows to Nandī, where one does *pradakṣiṇa* of the bull, making sure to touch the *pādukā*s that rest on the far side of him, which mark the spot where Jñāneśvar is said to have entered his tomb via a passageway underneath Nandī. At this point many devotees whisper into the left ear of Nandī if they have something special to say to or ask of Siddheśvara. This is a common practice at Śiva temples, for it is said that whatever is shared with Nandī in this ear goes straight to Śiva. From Nandī, the movement flows through the *maṇḍapa* of Siddheśvara and into his *garbhagṛha* for his *darśan*.

The presence of Jñāneśvar in the compound is not limited to his buried body but also extends to the memory of his movements through the space before he took *samādhi*. This was made clear to me while entering Siddheśvara's temple with my

[494] Novetzke 2009: 229.

academic host. On the threshold of the sanctum, he turned to me and said, "We may not know much for sure about the development of the other structures in the compound, but one thing we are certain of is that he [Jñāneśvar] touched this *liṅga*, Nivṛtti touched this *liṅga*, Nāmdev touched this *liṅga*. They all came for Siddheśvara's *darśan*. I always think of him touching this *liṅga* before I take Siddheśvara's *darśan*."[495] With that, he turned, knelt to the ground, placed his hand on top of the *liṅga*, and brought his forehead to it. Thus, in this devotee's perspective, even during Śiva's *darśan*, devotees are receiving the *darśan* of Jñāneśvar and the other Vārkarī poet-saints.

Immediately after Siddheśvara's *darśan*, it is customary to sit for a few minuets of meditation in his *maṇḍapa*. Then the flow moves out the southern doorway of Siddheśvara's shrine and around the corner to the right past the back (western) wall of his shrine to a staircase that leads up to the raised enclosure where the *ajana-vṛkṣa* grows. Here, as mentioned earlier, worshipers take *darśan* of the tree, while dedicated devotees sit on the marble slab floor of its courtyard chanting the *Jñāneśvarī*. After *darśan* of the tree, worshipers come down via a different set of stairs and enter into the central *maṇḍapa* that is aligned with Jñāneśvar's *samādhi*. Here they will sit for some time in meditation. After this, the formalities of the visit are done, and one may move around the entire compound at will, which most people do for some time. They may visit the pipal tree near the main gate, where Jñāneśvar's

[495] Personal communication with Vishwanath Karad, Dean and Founder, Maharashtran Institute of Technology and Unesco Chair of the Āḷandī Center for World Peace, January 2011.

mother performed her *pradakṣiṇa*. Women seeking a blessing to have children will make special offerings here. Devotees may also go visit the other tree near the Viṭṭhal and Rukmiṇī shrines and take *darśan* of Eknāth's *pādukā*s that are enshrined there, as this is said to be the tree under which he meditated when searching for site of Jñāneśvar's *samādhi*. Others may choose to go to the *vīṇā maṇḍapa*, the large hall closest to the main gate, and take *darśan* of Jñāneśvar's *abhaṅga*s by touching the feet of the *vīṇā* holding *kīrtankār*, who must continually stand while strumming the instrument (see Figure 42) and who is honored as an embodiment of the *abhaṅga*s. Thus, devotees after circumambulating the *samādhi* compound and visiting the various shrines will wander here and there after their *darśan*, enjoying the serene, still beauty of the compound.

Jñāneśvar *Samādhi* Compound as Temple

While there are many points of interaction with Jñāneśvar and his narrative in the space, it is the perceived living presence of Jñāneśvar seated in meditation deep within his *samādhi* sanctum that is the focal point of the compound. Devotees interact with this living presence in the very same manner as they interact with a deity in a temple. The first clue that this *samādhi* compound functions as a temple is in the name of the compound itself. Steel scaffolds on the top of the compound wall supports a massive sign in red neon letters that announces to points far off into the distance, "Śrī Jñāneśvar Mahārāj Samādhi Mandir" (The *Samādhi* Temple of

Jñāneśvar Mahārāj) (see Figure 43).[496] The next clue regarding its temple identity is the structure of the *samādhi* shrine itself. There can be no mistake that the structure over the *samādhi* marker is a classic *garbhagṛha* and *śikhara* (see Figures 31 and 43). Along with a *mūrti*—in this case, the entombed body of Jñāneśvar—these three components make up the fundamental aspects of a Hindu temple. From a distance, there is nothing to identify this structure as a *samādhi* shrine other than the sign, and everything about its visual language says, "temple".

Although the back wall of the *garbhagṛha* houses the *vigraha*s (sculpted images) of Viṭṭhal and Rukmiṇī, it is Jñāneśvar who is revered as the deity of this temple, and this we can find expressed in the architectural elements of the structure itself. The focal point of worship in the *garbhagṛha* is the *samādhi* marker situated at its center, which rests just above the presumed site of Jñāneśvar's meditating body. In relation to the ascension models discussed in previous chapters, the vertical alignment of this marker with the great sage designates it as an extension of his body. In this way, the *samādhi* marker becomes the *mūrti* of interaction for the shrine-cum-temple.

There are other architectural features as well that serve to identify Jñāneśvar as the deity of the space. As Tamara Sears points out in her analysis of a medieval Śaiva *maṭh*, "In temple architecture, the door frame preceding the entrance to the

[496] While the *samādhi* shrine tradition adheres itself to the notion of a temple by use of the term *mandīr*, the Sufi tomb-shrine tradition in India uses the term *dargāh* to designate the site where the Sufi *pīr* is buried. This term refers to a royal court. The interesting point of note here is that while the rituals performed in a *samādhi mandīr* are drawn from temple ritual, those temple rituals are themselves drawn initially from rituals reserved for the king as expressed in the Vedas. See Eaton 2003b: 274; Heesterman 1957.

main sanctum was traditionally ornamented with standard sets of divinities that fulfilled two distinct functions. The first was primarily auspicious and apotropaic: the doorway was the final threshold separating the space of the exterior world from the temple sanctum. The second was to signify the specific deity enshrined within; the figures depicted on the door frame both signaled the temple's sectarian affiliation and acted as a projection of the deity's presence from within."[497] There are two entrances to the *garbhagṛha* of Jñāneśvar's *samādhi*—one on the northern wall and one on the eastern wall. In the center of the lintel of the northern entrance is an image of Gaṇeśa, god of thresholds, remover of obstacles, and Śiva's son. As noted by Sears in her research on Śaiva *maṭh*s, this is a very common deity for the lintel of a Śiva temple and thus perhaps points to Jñāneśvar's Śaiva connection, if not to his self-identification with Śiva through his nondual realized state.[498] What is more unusual is the image found on the lentil of the eastern entrance, which is of Jñāneśvar himself (see Figure 44). In at least one of the *maṭh*s Sears has been investigating, she has identified rooms that she argues were sacred spaces reserved for the *guru* of the *maṭh*. These rooms had the image of the *guru* in the center of the lintel of the entrance doorway, declaring the *guru*, as an embodiment of Śiva, to be the deity of the room. In Āḷandī the same technique is employed to identify Jñāneśvar as the deity of this particular temple. This image does not go unnoticed by the throngs of devotees moving through the space. As the line progresses through the door and into the

[497] Sears 2008: 12-14.

[498] On Nāth identification with Śiva, see *Kaulajñānanirṇaya* 6.4-5, 17.37; Bagchi 2007: 29; Dasgupta 1962: 217-18.

garbhagṛha, nearly every person reaches up and touches the feet of the image before passing beneath it.

Other indications that Jñāneśvar's *samādhi* is considered as a temple can be found in the daily schedule of the compound. The rituals performed before the *samādhi* marker in the sanctum mirror, in many respects, those performed before the *mūrti* in a standard temple. Beginning at 4:15 am, Jñāneśvar is awakened by *kakadāratī* being performed by a brahmin *pūjārī* before the *samādhi* marker positioned above the Jñāneśvar's meditating body. This is followed by *pavana-pūjā* from 4:30-5:30 am. Then from 6:00-7:00 am, the *mahina-pūjā* and Śiva *stuti* are performed, immediately following which the doors are opened for public *darśan* until 12:00 noon. I am told that sometimes this *darśan* can run as late as 1:30 pm, as no one who comes is turned away. Once *darśan* has subsided, the doors are closed and *mahānaivedya* occurs, the offering of food. Immediately following, the doors are opened again for *darśan* until 3:00 pm. At this point, the doors are closed again, and Jñāneśvar, or more precisely, the stone *samādhi* marker above his entombed body, is "dressed" (*pośākh*) That is, a silver bust bearing the likeness of Jñāneśvar is placed on the top tier of the stone *samādhi* marker. The bust is then adorned with a crown and backed by an aureole (see Figure 46). *Pūjā* is performed to the image, which is also anointed with *kumkum* powder and sandalwood paste. Silk fabrics are wrapped around the base and garlands are draped around his neck. At 3:15 pm, the doors are reopened and *darśan* commences again until somewhere between 7:00-8:30 pm, depending on the size of the crowd. At 8:30 pm, *dhūpāratī* is performed, which

consists of waving a canister of burning incense. Then *darśan* continues until sometime between 10:15-10:45 pm, at which point *shejāratī* begins and runs until 11:30 pm when the doors of the shrine are closed for the night.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the *samādhi* marker of Jñāneśvar consists of an *aiḍūka*-like multi-stepped, pyramid-shaped black stone (see Figure 45). During the morning *darśan* period, the stone marker stands unadorned, and it is this exposed stone that is the contact point for morning *darśan*. The devotee will come forward and *praṇām*, touching his hands and forehead to the stone. Moreover, worshipers are invited to perform *abhiśeka* (ritual bathing) of the marker with the assistance of the *pūjārī*.[499] During this practice, the worshiper himself is directed by the *pūjārī* in the pouring of the various substances over the *samādhi* marker and rubbing them into the stone (see Figure 44). Others bring their own scented oils, with which they themselves anoint the stone. Coconuts, bananas, mangos, flowers, and garlands are also placed or draped on the stone marker. Worshipers experience a very intimate and personal encounter with the *samādhi* marker by means of the very rituals reserved for the *mūrti* of a temple.

As we have seen from our review of the daily schedule, in the afternoon *darśan* the *samādhi* marker is "dressed," during which a silver bust is placed on the marker that is adorned with a crown and draped in silk fabrics and garlands (see Figure 46). While in these afternoon *darśan*s, the gazing upon the image of Jñāneśvar

[499] *abhiṣeka* consists of the ritual pouring over the *mūrti* of the *pañcāmṛta* (five nectars), including milk, curd, *ghee* (clarified butter), honey, and sugar followed by water, which is usually infuced with rose or saffron.

is visually intimate and can stimulate in the worshiper deep adoration and devotion, there is no physical contact with the marker when it is dressed. All ritual action is mediated through the temple brahmin on behalf of the approaching devotee. On a practical level, this makes sense, as the mass of worshipers pressing in on the *samādhi* marker could jostle or disturb the masked portion of the marker. However, the pattern of these juxtaposed morning/afternoon *darśan* practices has a much deeper significance.

The significance can be found reflected in the ritual schedule of most North Indian Śiva temples. As Diana Eck and Ramchandra Dhere have pointed out, devotees coming for *darśan* at one of these temples will encounter this same juxtaposition of *darśan* practices with regard to the *liṅga*.[500] In the morning, in such temples as Kedārnāth, the aniconic *liṅga* is exposed and the worshiper is free to interact with it through touch. This unadorned *liṅga* is representative of Śiva's *niṣkala* (without parts) aspect, and as such Śiva is understood to be present as the formless absolute (see Figure 47a). In the afternoon the *liṅga* is "dressed" with a mask that slides over it and is often accompanied by a silver or brass cobra coiled at the base of the *liṅga*, which rises behind spreading its protective hood over the *sakala* (with parts) Śiva, or Śiva with form (see Figure 47b). When Śiva is present this way, devotees do not touch him. Interaction takes place through the medium of the priest.[501] What we are witness to at Jñāneśvar's *samādhi* shrine throughout the day is

[500] Eck 2012: 210; Dhere 2011: 145-47.

[501] Eck 2012: 210-11.

an encounter with Jñāneśvar in these same *niṣkala/sakala* aspects. During morning *darśan*, the interaction is with Jñāneśvar as the formless absolute, while in the afternoon the interaction is with this formless absolute as expressed through the body or image of Jñāneśvar (see Figure 48).

The intimacy of contact with the formless is thus juxtaposed with the separation caused by the form. What can be more intimate and personal than the formless absolute, in which there is no separation—this is the most intimate of experiences. The moment there is form, on the other hand, there is duality and thus separation. A distancing occurs, but in the case of Jñāneśvar's form, it is a distancing that allows for focused adoration and devotion. Thus, in Jñāneśvar's tradition we witness through the practice of *darśan* the tradition's ability to play at the pivot point between manifest and unmanifest reality—freedom within and through the paradox of the juxtaposition of *niṣkala/sakala*.

Something else of note regarding the "dressing" of the *samādhi* marker is relevant here. When the bust of Jñāneśvar is first placed on top of the stepped stone marker, before it has its crown on or is backed by its aureole and before it is draped in garlands and silk, it looks remarkably like a *liṅga* sitting on top of a tiered platform base. It is thus strikingly reminiscent of the description of the *aiḍūka* from the Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa that we encountered in the previous chapter (see Figure 49).

Mirrors and Crawl Spaces

Darśan of Jñāneśvar's *mūrti* has not always been so easy or so universal. During my fieldwork, I met an 82-year-old woman called Ajī (grandmother) who grew up in

Pune but spent all of her weekends, and sometimes part of the week, at the *samādhi* compound in Āḷandī, as her father was the Chief Trustee. She said that back then foreigners were not aloud to enter the shrine. The furthest they could go was into the courtyard, just inside the main gate. She said that she still has vivid memories of foreigners coming, as it was her special job to run and get the mirror for them. The way it worked was, if you were a foreigner and you wanted to have Jñāneśvar's *darśan*, you had to make arrangements beforehand and show up to the shrine by 8:00 am, because you had to time your *darśan* with the sun's cresting of the compound's eastern wall. Standing just inside the main gate, which is located midway along the northern wall, the sun was at the perfect angle to reflect off the mirror and shine a beam all the way through the three successive *maṇḍapa*s, pass through the small opening of the *garbhagṛha* doorway, and illuminate the bust of Jñāneśvar, which would be dressed for the occasion. She added that back then the doorway of the *garbhagṛha*, was only one foot by one foot and some four feet in depth! In order to see through this narrow corridor from that far away, one would have to kneel down, if not lie down, on the ground to achieve the proper angle. This process corresponds with the description given in the 1835 missionary encounter at the site.[502]

This small doorway was common in old Maharashtrian temples, and I know of one that is still like this today. It is dedicated to Kāniphnāth, one of the legendary "Nine Nāths." It is located on a mountaintop overlooking the southern sprawl of modern Pune. It marks the spot where Kāniphnāth is said to have sat in continuous

[502] See Mitchell: 1836: 46.

meditation for twelve years. Only shirtless men are aloud to enter the *garbhagṛha* of this temple. To do so, one must first lie completely prone on the ground and then angle the shoulders to fit diagonally into the opening. Then one must worm his way through the four-foot long, one-foot by one-foot passage into the sanctum. I witnessed several men who tried but were unable to fit through the corridor. They were simply turned away. Those small and agile enough to make it, after coming out the other end of the corridor would find themselves automatically in full *praṇām* in front of the meditation marker. To get back out, they had to perform the same process in reverse and come out feet first, so as not to point their feet towards the seat of the great *yogin* (see Figure 50).

I asked my elderly friend when it was that things changed for foreigners at Jñāneśvar's *samādhi* shrine in Āḷandī. She said that it was when they converted the doorway to its present size, sometime in the mid 1970s. Since then not only can foreigners come into the *garbhagṛha* for *darśan*, but many others who could never fit, or for whom such an undertaking was considered unsuitable—as in the case of women—have had intimate access to the sanctum.[503]

Silver *Pādukā*s

In the same way that deities dwelling in immovable temple *mūrti*s are able to leave their sanctums by means of their *utsava* (festival) *mūrti*s, Jñāneśvar is also able to leave his *samādhi* sanctum by becoming embodied in a pair of his silver *pādukā*s

[503] Swami Muktananda apparently made approving comments regarding the opening up of the doorway in the temple's guest book at the time of this renovation. I was unable to see this book first hand. Personal communication with Ajī Patel, Pune, June 2009.

(sandals), which he does every Thursday night. In India it is common to touch or bow to the feet of those in authority, whether of one's parents, teachers, or political leaders, but the feet of the *satguru* or realized sage are considered particularly special. They are revered, as are the feet of certain gods, not simply as a way of showing respect, but because of what they can bestow upon the devotee who has the good fortune to touch them, and it is even said that pure consciousness itself flows from the feet of a realized sage.[504] As such, representations of the deity's or the *guru*'s feet are often displayed in temples and shrines before the *mūrti*, and such representations include the *pādukā*s worn by such a being. When devotees come for *darśan*, it is often to the *pādukā*s that they offer their *praṇām*s.

On Thursdays, the day of the *guru*, the daily schedule at the Jñāneśvar *samādhi mandir* is a little different. From 9:30 pm to midnight, Jñāneśvar partakes in *pādukā mandir pradakṣiṇa*, in which his sandals are brought out of the sanctum and placed on a stand in the center of the *vīṇā maṇḍapa* (see Figure 51). They are then slowly moved in a two-and-one-half hour circumambulation of the compound via its *prākāra*. All the while the *pādukā*s are chanted to by devotees performing *abhaṅga*s, sacred hymns of the Vārkarī tradition composed either by Jñāneśvar or by other prominent Maharashtrian poet-saints, such as Nāmdev, Eknāth, or Tukārām. The *abhaṅga*s performed on this night are usually those that honor Jñāneśvar himself. The last *abhaṅga* of the evening, which is performed to the *pādukā*s just outside the

[504] See, for example, Padoux's translation of sections of the Kulārṇava Tantra pertaining to the *guru*'s *pādukā*s. Padoux 2000: 42, 47-51.

samādhi sanctum, is one by Tukārām, in which he pleads with Jñāneśvar to allow him to stay by his door all night, like a dog at the feet of his master.[505] Then, for an additional half-hour, *dhūpāratī* and the bedtime *āratī* are performed, followed at 12:30 am by the distribution of *prasād* to whomever is still in the compound. This special *prasād* that is offered is milk—Māulī's milk (Mother's milk)—and with that, the compound is closed for the night.

The Case of the Swiveling *Kalaśa*

There is one other significant occasion when Jñāneśvar becomes embodied in his *pādukā*s. Once a year, during the dark fortnight of the month of Āṣāḍh (June-July), Jñāneśvar's presence is held to depart from his *samādhi* shrine, embodied in a pair of his silver *pādukā*s, and he is carried on a palanquin (*pālkhī*) to Paṇḍharpur for Lord Viṭṭhal's *darśan*. During the entire journey, which takes two weeks on foot in the monsoon rain, he is accompanied by throngs of his devotees who continually chant *abhaṅga*s along the way.[506] This annual pilgrimage is undertaken in continuation of the chanting pilgrimages that Jñāneśvar is believed to have made with his fellow poet-saint Nāmdev to the Viṭṭhal temple in Paṇḍharpur. Thus, the tradition holds that he has been making this pilgrimage once a year for over seven hundred years!

The commencement moment of this pilgrimage reveals something very interesting with regard to the ascension models we have been considering throughout

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[505] Personal communication with Mahesh Gopal Gokle, Trustee for Śrī Jñāneśvar Mahārāj Samādhi Trust, March 5, 2011.

[506] For a clear and brief description of the history and practices of this pilgrimage, see Engblom 1987: 15-22.

this study. There is an unusual phenomenon at play in Āḷandī in that the *kalaśa* of Jñāneśvar's *samādhi* shrine moves. It swivels on its base—not just sometimes, but apparently all of the time. When I inquired about this purported phenomenon, this is what I was told. People come for *darśan*, and when Jñāneśvar sees them coming he feels happy, *ānanda* (bliss) arises in him, and he moves his head, causing the *kalaśa* that crowns the *śikhara* to swivel. Sometimes it moves a lot, other times less so, but the claim is that it is always moving. This changes when the time comes for the annual pilgrimage to Paṇḍharpur. At this time hundreds of Jñāneśvar's devotees, along with Jñāneśvar's palanquin containing his silver *pādukās*, gather around his *samādhi* shrine with their eyes anxiously trained on the *kalaśa*. They are awaiting the moment that will tell them the journey to the feet of Lord Viṭṭhal is about to begin. By means of yogic ascension similar to *utkrānti*, Jñāneśvar is understood to forcibly erupt out of his entombed body, up through the *aiḍūka*-like *samādhi* marker, and out through the crown of the shrine-cum-temple—the *kalaśa*. The sign that this has taken place is the slowing and eventual ceasing of the *kalaśa*'s movement. When this occurs, everyone knows that Jñāneśvar has left his shrine and is prepared to take the journey. As this happens, their gaze turns from Jñāneśvar's *kalaśa* to the *kalaśa* on top of Siddheśvara's shrine, for Jñāneśvar has not yet entered his *pādukā*s. Instead, he has gone to Siddheśvara to ask for blessings to undertake the journey. "Shall I go?" He is said to ask. "Yes. Go!" Śiva answers, moving his head. The force of this approval is said to visibly shudder through the *kalaśa* of Siddheśvara's shrine, and it is this movement that signals the beginning. When Siddheśvara's *kalaśa* swivels, the

crowd of pilgrims erupts in cheers, as it is understood that Jñāneśvar's presence has entered his awaiting *pādukā*s sitting in the ox-drawn palanquin, and now the long awaited and greatly anticipated pilgrimage to Lord Viṭṭhal can begin. Jñāneśvar is ready to walk and chant with his devotees.[507]

What is interesting to note here is that the models of ascension discussed earlier—that of the fire altar, that of the temple structure, that of the realized sage's body, and that of the *aiḍūka*—are all superimposed upon one another in the case of the *samādhi* shrine. The association of Jñāneśvar's head with the *kalaśa* of his shrine-cum-temple, together with his perceived movement up through not only his body but the *samādhi* structure as well, show that these notions of ascension embedded in the models have permeated the awareness of the common population. They are not merely esoteric notions.

Jñāneśvar as Text

As with all the Vārkarī poet-saints, Jñāneśvar is also understood to be embodied in his *abhaṅga*s. The largest of the *maṇḍapa*s that is aligned with Jñāneśvar's *samādhi* sanctum, the one closest to the main entrance gate, is the *vīṇā maṇḍapa*, where group performances of his *abhaṅga*s take place. As with all sites dedicated to one of the Vārkarī poet-saints, his *abhaṅga*s are held to be embodied in the *vīṇā-kīrtankār*, who,

[507] Personal communication with Mahesh Gopal Gokle, Trustee for Śrī Jñāneśvar Mahārāj Samādhi Trust, and Anant Jośi, former Trustee for Śrī Jñāneśvar Mahārāj Samādhi Trust and life-long Jñāneśvar devotee, March 5, 2011. The movement of the *kalaśa* can be seen in a German documentary film about the Vākarī movement and its annual pilgrimage to Paṇḍharpur. Although, the film narration seems to suggest that the crowd is awaiting the movement of Jñāneśvar's *kalaśa* rather than Siddheśvar's. See *Vari* 1990.

as mentioned earlier, stands continually inside this *maṇḍapa* strumming a *vīṇā*, which is slung around his neck (see Figure 42). This instrument is never allowed to touch the ground and is passed in shifts to other *vīṇā-kīrtankār*s so that, in essence, Jñāneśvar's *abhaṅga*s are performed around the clock. If for some reason the instrument is not in use, it must be hung, most commonly in a tree.

Not only is Jñāneśvar embodied in the words of his *abhaṅga*s; he is also held to be embodied in the text of the *Jñāneśvarī*. The text is revered as a *mudrā*, an embodied gesture of the absolute, in that the absolute has impressed itself upon the text in such a way that the text carries the very experience of the absolute.[508] Jñāneśvar claims as much in the text itself.[509]

> Therefore I have served the dish of my spiritual experience in the form of this talk which is Anubhavamrit. . . .
>
> Those who enter the inner sanctorum of these words are like rivers mingling with the ocean.[510]

This reverence for the text as the embodiment of Jñāneśvar is evident in devotees' engagement with the text in the space of the *samādhi* compound. While conducting my field research, I witnessed the beginning of a pilgrimage from Āḷandī to Dvārakā, where a weeklong recitation of the *Jñāneśvarī* was to take place. When I arrived at the *samādhi* compound around 8:00 am, several thousand people had already converged on the compound and in the surrounding alleyways. As the crowd continued to build outside, the trustees of the shrine gathered in the *vīṇā maṇḍapa*,

[508] On this notion of *mudrā*, see Muller-Ortega 2000: 581.

[509] Tulpule 1979: 332.

[510] *Anubhavāmṛta* 10.24, 28.

along with the *saṃnyāsin* who was leading the pilgrimage. Orange *pheṭā*s (Maharashtrian turbans) were tied on all the officials,[511] and they entered the *garbhagṛha* carrying a copy of the *Jñāneśvarī* for Jñāneśvar's *darśan*. The book was placed on the *samādhi* marker as the temple brahmin recited *mantra*s. It was then taken out and placed in Jñāneśvar's seat on his palanquin. After shawls were offered and wrapped around all the officials, the palanquin was suddenly lifted and the procession burst out the doors into the surrounding courtyard. The crowd erupted into a rhythmic chorus of "Jñānobāī Māulī, Jñānobāī Māulī, Jñānobāī Māulī," as the palanquin bounced along in time, making its way around the *samādhi* compound by way of the *prākāra*, which was now packed to capacity. The fervor was palpable, with the throngs of devotees behaving as if Jñāneśvar himself was really sitting there in the palanquin, soaking up all the joyous attention. Yet it was the text of the *Jñāneśvarī* that was enthroned and riding high on the shoulders over the crowd. From the *samādhi* compound, the procession spilled out into the streets of Āḷandī in a jubilantly raucous circumambulation of the entire town before heading off in the direction of Dvārakā, some 1,060 kilometers away. Staggered by the thought of walking anywhere in the Indian heat, let alone over a thousand kilometers, I was relieved to learn that after continuing for a couple of miles outside of town, the

[511] This is customary Maharashtrian welcome offered to visiting male dignitaries whether foreign or domestic and likely originates in some medieval court custom. As a visiting language student and later as a research scholar, I was presented with this same welcome in such disparate circumstances as visiting a temple compound to visiting a martial arts studio.

procession stopped in a shady courtyard for a *bhaṇḍārā* (feast) before boarding chartered buses, which carried the pilgrims and the sacred text the rest of the way—a fifteen-hour drive to their recitation destination.

Other Vārkarī *Samādhi* Shrines

With regard to the yearly pilgrimage to Paṇḍharpur, there are at least twenty-seven other such groups that make this same annual journey to Lord Viṭṭhal, all timing their departures so as to converge on Paṇḍharpur at the same time. Each one of these pilgrimage groups hails from a *samādhi* shrine of one of the other poet-saints of the Vārkarī tradition scattered throughout Maharashtra.[512] Among these, there is a particular group of saints who form the principal lineage of the Vārkarī movement. This lineage is hailed in text and in song the length and breadth of Maharashtra. For example, there is a popular recording in Maharashtra of *Jay Jay Rāma Kṛṣṇa Hari* by Suresh Vāḍkar, in which he juxtaposes the Vaiṣṇava verses of the title with Jñāneśvar:

> *Jay Jay Rāma Kṛṣṇa Hari*
> *Jay Jay Rām, Jay Jay Rām*
> *Jñāneśvara, Jñāneśvara,*
> *Oṃ Namo Śrī Jñāneśvara*
>
> Victory to Rāma, to Kṛṣṇa, to Viṣṇu
> Jñāneśvar. Jñāneśvar.
> Oṃ, I bow to Śrī Jñāneśvar.[513]

Then midway through the half-hour long chant, there is a break, and the focus shifts to the lineage of the Vārkarī tradition:

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[512] Vaudeville 1974: 157.

[513] Vāḍkar 2000.

Jñānobāī Māulī Tukārām
Jñānobāī Māulī Tukārām
Jñānobāī, *Jñānobāī*, *Jñānobāī*, *Jñānobāī*
Jñānobāī Māulī Tukārām

Mother Jñāneśvar, Tukārām. . . .

These two figures are the bookends of the tradition: Jñāneśvar is the founding *guru* and philosophical genius from the thirteenth century, and Tukārām is the last Vārkarī saint and greatest poet among them from the seventeenth century. Following this verse, Vāḍkar strings together, in a tongue-twisting burst, the figures in the lineage:

Nivṛtti, *Jñānadev*, *Sopāṇ*, *Muktābāī*, *Eknātha*, *Nāmdev*, *Tukārām*[514]

As these figures form the main lineage of the Vārkarī tradition, we will briefly consider the *samādhi* shrines of each of them, along with the shrines of several other Vārkarī poet-saints.

Although the Vārkarī movement has a Vaiṣṇava veneer reflected in its central devotion to Viṭṭhal, it is known for its blurring of distinctions with respect to sectarian affiliations as well as gender and caste, as is illustrated by the example of the tradition's appropriation of yogic and tantric concepts associated with Śaiva movements. This cross-sectarian fluidity of the Vārkarī tradition is apparent in the layout and location of many of its *samādhi* shrines, as Vaudeville has suggested.[515] For example, several of the *samādhi* shrines are located in Śiva temple compounds. As we have seen, the Vārkarī movement also has important connections to the Nāth

[514] The chronological position of Nāmdev and Eknāth are switched here, I assume, for meter reasons.

[515] See Vaudeville 1974: 137-161.

tradition, which are reflected not only in Jñāneśvar's *samādhi* compound but in the *samādhi* compounds of his brothers as well.

The *samādhi* shrine of Nivṛttināth, Jñāneśvar's *guru* and older brother, is in Tryambakeśvar (see Figure 52). Nivṛttināth was a Nāth yogi, and likely a Śaiva, through whom Jñāneśvar traced his lineage back to the founding *guru*s of the Nāth tradition.[516] While his *samādhi* shrine is located in a far more modest Śiva temple compound than the *samādhi* compound of Jñāneśvar, what is noteworthy is its proximity to one of the most revered Śiva *liṅga*s in all of India, Tryambakeśvar. This major Śaiva pilgrimage center is the site of one of the famed twelve *jyotirliṅga*s (*liṅga*s of light), which is located at the heart of the town where Nivṛttināth is buried. Like his younger brother, Nivṛttināth's *samādhi* shrine is topped by a *śikhara*, and his *samādhi* marker is of the same style, a step-pyramid black stone. On my visit to the shrine, I wedged myself into a corner of the tiny *garbhagṛha*, as the ebb and flow of streams of visitors moved in and out for Nivṛttināth's *darśan*. With barely enough room between my knees and the stone marker, I sat gazing at the silver-masked face of Jñāneśvar's revered *guru* and older brother. Embossed on the *pūjā* cabinet behind him was Jñāneśvar's most enduring epithet for the one he credits with his attainment. It reads, "*Oṃ namo cit-sūryā śrī nivṛttī"* ("Om, I bow to Śrī Nivṛtti, the sun of consciousness") (see Figure 53).

Just southeast of Pune, not far past the Kāniphnāth temple mentioned earlier, is the small village of Sāsvaḍ. It is here in a small fortressed Śiva temple compound

[516] Ranade 2003: 47-48.

that Jñāneśvar's brother Sopāṇ took *samādhi* in a similar fashion to his brother. Situated directly behind the Śiva temple, his *samādhi* shrine is also marked by a step-pyramid black stone and surmounted by a *śikhara* (see Figure 54). A pair of *pādukā*s rests on a pedestal in front of a cleft in the hollow tree that stands next to his shrine (see Figure 55). Entering the earth through a cavity in the hollow tree, Sopāṇ is said to have taken *samādhi* deep in the earth. To this day, after passing through Pune on his yearly pilgrimage, Jñāneśvar comes on his palanquin here to Sāsvaḍ. He comes not only to pay his respects to his brother, but also to pick him up. At this point in Jñāneśvar's pilgrimage, Sopāṇ's palanquin joins the caravan, and they make the rest of the journey together.

In contrast to her three brothers, Muktābāī is said to have disappeared in a flash of lightning while performing *kīrtan* during a torrential storm. The purported spot where this occurred, in Edalābāda, is marked by a cenotaph, as there was no body around which a traditional *samādhi* shrine could be constructed. Nevertheless, the town is marked by her presence, as it is now known by the name Muktainagar.[517]

A number of the Vārkarī poet-saints' *samādhi* shrines have a direct physical relationship to the Viṭṭhal Temple in Paṇḍharpur, and as such act as satellite extensions of the temple space, not the least of which is the *samādhi* shrine of Nāmdev, the low-born tailor and companion of Jñāneśvar. He is said to have been buried under the first step of the Viṭṭhal Temple itself so that he could have the

[517] The logistics of visiting this rural site were untenable during my field research window. I do plan to visit Muktābāī's shrine during subsequent research trips.

continual *darśan* of Viṭṭhal's devotees at the culminating moment of their pilgrimage (see Figure 56).[518] Ironically, out of reverence for Nāmdev, no one is allowed to step here anymore. Devotees can still come forward to offer *praṇām*s and do *pūjā* to Nāmdev, but they must then enter the Viṭṭhal Temple by way of an alternate staircase that bypasses and overlooks the spot of Nāmdev's *samādhi*.[519]

A few other Vārkarī *samādhi* shrines are worth noting here. The *samādhi* shrine of Chokhāmeḷā, the untouchable *mahār*, is located directly across from the entrance to the Viṭṭhal Temple and literally faces Nāmdev's *samādhi* shrine (see Figure 57). Since he was not allowed to enter the temple due to his untouchable status, it is said that he often took *darśan* from this spot just outside the temple grounds.[520] In addition, the *samādhi* shrine of Nāmdev's maidservant Janābāī is located in the riverbed below the Viṭṭhal Temple.

While in Paṇḍharpur, we must consider the legendary root of the Vārkarī movement: Puṇḍalīk. As discussed in our earlier exploration of the Viṭṭhal Temple, the small temple dedicated to Puṇḍalīk is held to mark the site where the *svarūpa mūrti* of Lord Viṭṭhal first appeared, after which it was transported to the site of the Viṭṭhal Temple. This small temple is referred to by the tradition as Puṇḍalīk's *samādhi* shrine (see Figure 17). Like Janābāī's, it is situated in the riverbed directly in

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[518] This reverence for the devotee in the tradition was expressed to me repeatedly by practitioners during my fourteen-month stay in Maharashtra in 2000-2001.

[519] Though the Vārkarī tradition recognizes Paṇḍharpur as the site of Nāmdev's death, and the first step of the Viṭṭhal Temple as the site of his burial, there are other sites competing for the claim of his *samādhi*. See Novetzke 2008: 49, 257, n. 44.

[520] Regarding both Nāmdev's and Cokhāmeḷā's *samādhi* shrines, see Vaudeville 1974: 158-159.

line with the main gate to the Viṭṭhal Temple on the hill above it. Puṇḍalīk's *samādhi* shrine is the first site visited upon entering Paṇḍharpur by pilgrims making the annual journey to have Lord Viṭṭhal's *darśan*.[521] It features an eight-sided *garbhgṛha* mounted by a *śikhara*, inside of which is a Śiva *liṅga* covered by a brass image of Puṇḍalīk, with a cobra coiled round its base and its hood spread over the head of the legendary saint (see Figure 18). As in Jñāneśvar's case, the mask over the *liṅga* represents Śiva's *niṣkala/sakala* aspects. What is distinctive is that the mask covers an actual *liṅga* rather than a step-pyramid *samādhi* marker. As discussed earlier, Dhere argues that this is because Puṇḍalīk's *samādhi* shrine is in actuality a Śiva temple and Puṇḍalīk is Śiva himself. He asserts that Puṇḍalīk is an abbreviated version of Puṇḍalīkeśvar just as Tryambak is short for Tyambhakeśvar. In this regard, Dhere convincingly argues that Śiva was the original deity of the town of Paṇḍharpur in the form of Puṇḍalīk, and with the rise of Viṭṭhal he was absorbed into the Vaiṣṇava narrative as Viṭṭhal's greatest devotee and the focal point of the origin story of the *savrūpa mūrti* of the Lord standing on a brick. In support of this theory, Dhere points to the strictly Śaiva elements of the shrine. First and foremost is the presence of the *liṅga*, to which is offered *bilva* leaves, a traditional offering at Śiva temples. He then points to the Nandī sitting in attendance outside. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, the temple is under the control of local Koḷīs, low-caste Śaivas, who are responsible for the management and performance of ritual in many Śiva temples in the vicinity of Paṇḍharpur. Furthermore, as we have seen, the only major annual festival celebrated

[521] Vaudeville 1974: 145.

at the temple is Mahāśivarātri. Dhere also points to the Vārkarī poet-saints themselves in support of his observations. In all their collected *abhaṅga*s, the bust of Puṇḍalīk is always identified as his *liṅga* rather than his *samādhi* marker.[522] Irrespective of this ambiguity, however, the Vārkarī tradition recognizes this Śiva temple as the spot of Puṇḍalīk's *samādhi*.

In the previous chapter, we learned that the sixteenth-century poet-saint Eknāth was a *deśastha* brahmin from Paiṭhaṇ, the Maharashtrian hub of bramanical authority, yet his *guru*, Janārdana, was the disciple of a regional Sufi master, Cānd Bodhale, of the Qādiri *silsila*. Janārdana's *samādhi* shrine sits at the very top of the mountain fortress of Daulatabad, of which he was in charge as a *killedāra* for the Nizam's army. Cānd Bodhale's *dargāh*, on the other hand, of which Eknāth is said to have had a hand in building, rests at the bottom of the hill-fort, and though the entire site of Daulatabad is now an abandon ruin, including Janārdana's *samādhi* site,[523] this *dargāh* is still a functioning compound with a living ritual tradition. Eknāth himself is said to have taken self-willed *jala-samādhi* (water *samādhi*) at Paiṭhaṇ by walking into the Godāvarī River and disappearing under the current, leaving only a garland of flowers floating on the surface. His *samādhi* shrine is located within a walled compound above the *ghāṭ* where he was last seen entering the water (see Figure 58).

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[522] Dhere 2011: 144-49. See pages 146-47 for images of both the dressed and the unadorned *liṅga*.

[523] During my exploration of the abandoned town and fort of Daulatabad in 2009, the only other person my colleagues and I came across was a female attendant to Janārdana's *samādhi* site, whom we found seeking shelter from the noonday sun inside the cave where he is buried.

Inside the compound is an open-aired *maṇḍapa* at the back of which rests a pair of Eknāth's *pādukā*s enshrined in a silver case on a raised platform (see Figure 59). As in the case of Muktābāī, there is no physical body entombed here, and thus the shrine must be recognized as a cenotaph, a memorial marking the spot where Eknāth left this world.

The last great figure of the Vārkarī movement, the seventeenth-century Tukārām, is celebrated as the pinnacle of this poet-saint tradition. Although some have argued that he also hails from a Sufi tradition, he himself traces his spiritual lineage back to the Caitanya movement, and his deep Vaiṣṇava roots are reflected in his devotion to Lord Viṭṭhal, which is masterfully captured in his poetry.[524] Tukārām's case is of particular interest because, although his presence in his hometown of Dehu is evident at every turn, he lacks a *samādhi* shrine, as he is said to have experienced a corporeal ascension into the absolute and to have left no body behind around which a *samādhi* shrine could be constructed.[525] Even so, there is a shrine encasing the tree at the foot of which Tukārām is said to have been sitting when he ascended, but it lacks the gravity that a corporeal presence provides, and thus the shrine is one of several spread throughout the town that mark the locations of various events in Tukārām's life (see Figure 60). This distribution makes for a defused sense of sacred space. In this case, the entire town is associated with Tukārām's presence, rather than any one particular place within it.

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[524] Tulpule 1979: 387.

[525] This point was explained to me by the eleventh-generation descendant of Tukārām during a tour he offered me while hosting my visit to Dehu in February 2001.

Collectively, the *samādhi* shrines of these Vārkarī poet-saints, along with the Viṭṭhal Temple in Paṇḍharpur, constitute the sacred geography of the Vārkarī movement. Much scholarship has emphasized the tradition's devotional focus on the *mūrti* of Lord Viṭṭhal housed in the temple in Paṇḍharpur, and most studies of the tradition's notions of sacred space have focused on the Viṭṭhal Temple. This gives the impression that the Viṭṭhal Temple is the exclusive focus of the Vārkarī tradition, whereas in fact the *samādhi* shrines of the tradition's lineage of poet-saints form significant foci for the movement as well.[526] As we have seen, rather than being the sole focal point of the tradition, the Viṭṭhal Temple in Paṇḍharpur acts more like a hub and thus must be seen in relation to these other sacred sites.

Viṭṭhal Comes to Āḷandī

As we have seen, in the early monsoon season of each year, the poet-saints of the Vārkarī tradition converge on Paṇḍharpur. Leaving the serenity of their *samādhi* shrines, they travel on palanquins from the far reaches of Maharashtra to the feet of Lord Viṭṭhal, and then back again in a grand pulsation that is the hallmark of the Vārkarī tradition. Even so, there is one other pilgrimage of the tradition that moves in the reverse direction. In Nāmdev's account of Jñāneśvar's passing, Viṭṭhal is present as one of the witnesses to his *saṃjīvan samādhi*. According to this account, Lord Viṭṭhal proclaimed that Jñāneśvar is a manifestation of the absolute and declared that an annual pilgrimage to Āḷandī would be the tradition's other great festival. Thus, during the dark fortnight of the month of Kārtīk (October-November), Viṭṭhal himself

[526] Deleury 1960: 73.

travels in his own palanquin to Āḷandī to have Jñāneśvar's *darśan*, for according to Mahīpati, Viṭṭhal declares that Jñāneśvar is none other than "God Supreme."[527] Once I asked one of the trustees the *samādhi* compound if he had ever gone on the pilgrimage to Paṇḍharpur. Gesturing toward the *samādhi* sanctum, he replied, "Why go anywhere when the Lord is sitting right there?"[528]

Further Reflections

Like our case studies of the Mīnākṣī-Sundareśvara Temple in Madurai and the Viṭṭhal Temple in Paṇḍharpur, our analysis of Jñāneśvar's *samādhi mandir* reveals the ways in which the unique personality of the *mūrti*—in this case, Jñāneśvar—finds particularized expression in the space. In Āḷandī this expression manifests in a tomb-shrine that mirrors the ritual functions of a temple. Like the *mūrti*s of Sundareśvara and Viṭṭhal, there is no need for consecration, for Jñāneśvar's living presence is spontaneously established in the *svarūpa mūrti* of his body that he left behind when he entered into *samādhi*.

Jñāneśvar operates at a critical juncture in Maharashtra characterized by the rise of Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* traditions. Maybe he was an esoteric Śaiva among an ever Vaiṣṇava leaning populace, and, like any good teacher, he met his students where they were—on the battlefield at Kurukṣetra. He heralds *bhakti* as being *the* experience of the ultimate. The experience of *bhakti* is the culminating fruit of all those esoteric austerities and practices performed by the *yogin*s. According to

[527] *Bhaktavijaya* 10.41. See *Bhaktavijaya* 1988: v. 1, 161.

[528] Personal communication with Mahesh Gopal Gokle, Trustee for Śrī Jñāneśvar Mahārāj Samādhi Trust, March 5, 2011.

Jñāneśvar, the experience of realization is one of pure devotion. As such, he instructs the masses that they have no need for the *yogin*'s secret practices. If *bhakti* is the experience of the goal, then why not just focus on *bhakti* and do away with all that other stuff?[529] In this regard, Jñāneśvar seems to have loosened the moorings of esoteric sectarian traditions, to use a notion argued by Kiss, and allowed his non-dual teachings to drift into a devotional setting of the general populace oriented around the Vaiṣṇava expression of the Bhagavad Gītā and the form of Viṭṭhal residing in Paṇḍharpur.[530]

One morning, in the still and silent pre-dawn darkness of the compound, while a handful of devotees were waiting for the sanctum to open for *darśan*, I watched a lone *sādhu* approach the back of the *samādhi* shrine. He placed a cup on the ground and softly said, "Milk, Mother."[531] Quietly, and without breaking stride in his morning *āratī* preparations, the temple brahmin poured the milk.

[529] *Amṛtānubhāva* 9.30; Jñā 18.1145. See Bahirat 1956: 143-48.
[530] Kiss 2012: 162.
[531] *Dūdh Māulī*.

Concluding Remarks

The embodied nature of the Hindu temple is rooted in the temporary sacrificial field of the Vedic fire sacrifice. By incorporating the fundamental structure of the Vedic fire altar into its design, the Hindu temple reveals itself to be a well-conceived project that grounds itself in the authority of the Veda while at the same time absorbing many of the semantic significations of the Vedic sacrifice. With this development the temporary sacrificial field created to last only for the duration of the sacrifice gives way to a permanent sacred space in the form of the temple. In addition, in contrast to the aniconic Vedic sacrifice, the incorporation of a *mūrti* in the "womb" of the temple space not only provides a focal point for worship but, more importantly, functions as a body for the divine presence who is ritually invoked to take up residence in it. The deity becomes instantiated in the *mūrti* and radiates his or her power out through the entire temple complex. In this way, the role of the Vedic fire altar as a means of instantiating a divine presence finds expression in new forms in the Hindu temple.

This move from the temporary to the permanent, accompanied by an elaboration of the notion of embodied presence, brings with it a shift from the homogeneous to the specific—a specificity that increases over time. The longer a

specific temple exists, the further it is differentiated from other temples by its community of worshipers. In the Vedic context, the size of a given sacrificial field is specific to the physical dimensions of its *yajamāna* from whom the measurements of its constructed form are derived and can in this way be understood as individually distinct. However, the sacred space of any given temporary sacrificial field is understood to be the reconstituted body of the primordial Puruṣa Prajāpati, and there is thus nothing to distinguish one Vedic fire altar from another other than its relative size. The priests are ever engaged in recreating the same fire altar. Hindu temples, on the other hand, although perhaps sharing structural similarities due to their reliance on the paradigmatic formulas of construction found in the Vāstu-Śāstras and Śilpa-Śāstras, take on specific characteristics and "personalities" related to the unique local manifestation of the deity housed in the temple. This movement into specificity with regard to divine manifestation engenders an additional shift from the translocal to the local. In other words, Śiva may be Śiva, but Śiva over there in that temple is not the same as Śiva over here in this temple, even though he is never separated from his larger pan-Indian mythological construction. In this way, he is always understood as a local manifestation of a transcendent deity, while, at least in the case of Sundareśvara in Madurai and perhaps in Tamil Nadu as a whole, as Shulman indicates, his female power in the form of his consort is recognized as a purely local construction, unique to her place of manifestation.[532]

[532] Shulman 1980: 51.

Moreover, the ways in which the unique localized embodiment of the deity in a particular temple engages with the surrounding world shapes the ways in which the space is conceived and configured over time, creating a mythico-historical personality of place that becomes woven throughout the physical structure of the temple, as we have seen in our explorations of the Mīnākṣī-Sundareśvara Temple and the Viṭṭhal Temple. As "living beings'' established in space over time, these divine manifestations can be said to "live lives" in these places, and these "lives" are then reflected in the construction and organization of the space. It is in its existence through time that the individual life of a unique, local instantiation of divinity takes shape and is expressed through the characteristics that identify it as Sundareśvara, Naṭarāja, or Arunachaleśvarar as a distinctive "personality."

Thus, it is through its temporal longevity that the temple is able to develop its unique and specific expression of embodiment. I would argue that it is this longevity more than any other aspect that gives rise to the distinct differences that exist between the Hindu temple and the Vedic sacrificial field. While one may argue for the existence of specificity in the Vedic sacrificial field, its temporality denies it the opportunity to develop into an established personality of place, for the expression of its "life" is short. It never has time to accumulate the layers of identity that accrue to a temple over successive generations of engagement by a community of worshipers. There is nothing like several centuries of recognized embodiment to develop a dense and complex form of divine expression.

This divine expression is not limited to deities in temples. As we have found, the Hindu *samādhi* shrine is an important form of sacred space in the South Asian milieu. The practice of burying the body of the realized sage who has attained Brahman has a long history in South Asia, dating as far back as the Vedic Āraṇyakas. Yet material evidence of the practice prior to the thirteenth century is relatively scarce. It is not that the practice did not exist; it is that it was undertaken in such a way as to render its material remains unrecognizable as such. A possible explanation for the lack of early material evidence of such practices in Hindu traditions could have to do with the fact that such practices were employed by small esoteric traditions gathered around revered *guru*s. Most of the traditions that would have revered the *guru* in such a way as to warrant burial of his body were discrete, lineage-based groups**.** When the *guru* of such a tradition left his body, the group created a *samādhi* and placed a marker on the burial site. It is not that the practice would have been secretive, but the size of any given group gathered around such a figure would have been small. Just a handful of disciples would have been responsible for tending the body at burial and engaging in any continued interaction with the *samādhi* site. In the case of an esoteric Śaiva tradition once the members of this initial small group dispersed over time and the generational memory of the *guru* faded, what was left would perhaps only be identifiable as a *liṅga* marker and thus might eventually be accepted as a generic Śiva shrine, perhaps retaining a name somehow associated with the original *guru* who was buried at the site. Given this scenario, the material

evidence of pre-Sufi era *samādhi* burial practices may lie hidden beneath countless generic Śiva shrines strewn across the length and breadth of the Indian subcontinent.

In comparison with the Buddhist mortuary tradition centered on the *stūpa*, the Hindu *samādhi* burial tradition was further confined by the practice of burying the entire body of the realized sage. This meant that in the case of a Hindu sage, the *samādhi* would be limited to a single burial site, while in the case of the Buddha or Buddhist masters, the relics of the cremated body could be divided and subdivided in any number of locations, allowing for a massive distribution of *stūpa* relics across the Buddhist world. This is evidenced in the Buddhist tradition's claim that Aśoka created 84,000 *stūpa*s to house the remains of the Buddha. Such different methods of internment could account for the great disparity in numbers between Hindu *samādhi* sites and Buddhist *stūpa*s.

With the rise of *bhakti* in Hindu traditions, the popularity of such revered *guru*s expanded, especially in the case of those poet-saints who inspired an upsurge of devotion among the general populace through giving poetic expression to their devotion in the vernacular language. Their memory was sustained not by a small group of core disciples but by ever increasing swaths of the general populace who were moved by their poetic expressions of devotion. From the Deccan region northward, this popular expression of *bhakti* coincided with the arrival and subsequent explosion of the Sufi *dargāh* tradition across India in the twelfth to thirteenth centuries. This has led many scholars to speculate that the spread of Hindu *samādhi* shrines in this period may owe much to the presence of the popular Sufi

dargāh tradition. While I agree that the presence of the *dargāh* tradition was a major catalysis for the emergence of *samādhi* shrine worship, I would argue that this was not an outright borrowing but rather an absorption and sublimation of an already existing worship technique from a parallel devotional religious tradition.

With the rise of *bhakti* traditions centered around particular realized poet-saints, these regional vernacular devotional traditions resonated with the newly arrived Sufi traditions with their focus on reverence for particular *pīr*s. The presence of the fully developed tomb-shrine tradition of the *dargāh* could have catalyzed the spread of pre-Sufi *samādhi* burial practices in the surrounding Hindu traditions into full-fledged shrine worship traditions. In this way, a pre-existing, yet historically less visible, practice of *samādhi* burial could have suddenly found itself foregrounded as a central form of sacred space and worship, which was increasingly embraced by vernacular Hindu devotional traditions and giving distinctly Hindu ritual expression from that moment forward.

This newfound post-mortem guru worship, though highly influenced by the Sufi tradition, is grounded in distinctly Hindu modes of expression. Everything about Jñāneśvar taking *samādhi* and marking the spot with a *samādhi* stone is conducive with pre-*dargāh* Hindu practices with roots as far back as the Vedic Āraṇyakas. What is new seems to be the post-mortem worship of the *guru* by means of a shrine-cum-temple erected over the buried body. This post-mortem worship is most likely the influence of the presence of the popular *dargāh* tradition and the softening of religious boundaries through the mingling of Nāth Yogīs and Sufis. This post-mortem

worship is not so much a Hindu turning towards Muslim practice, but rather an easy extension of a practice of pre-mortem *guru* worship long in existence under the pressure of exploding *bhakti* oriented traditions whose focus on their founding poet-saints was ripe for such an undertaking.[533] Given this, the parallel devotional complex of the Sufi *dargāh* was a suitable option for continued worship of the *guru* in his post-mortem state. Once the post-mortem body of the *guru* is accepted as the focal point of worship, the rituals associated with that worship gravitate toward the rituals of temple worship rather than the rituals of Sufi *dargāh* worship. In the case of Jñāneśvar's *samādhi* site in Āḷandī, this blossomed into a devotional ritual tradition with the body of the *guru* acting as an enlivened *mūrti* and the *samādhi* shrine functioning as a temple.

Over time the use of the term *samādhi* to designate the place of burial of a realized sage broadens into a term that is utilized to denote a memorial marking the mortuary remains of some revered figure, yet not necessarily one who was believed to have been realized. Moreover, the mortuary remains in such cases may comprise cremation ashes rather than a body. A few examples from Pune will serve to illustrate this point. On the outskirts of Kalyani Nagar, a relatively affluent neighborhood on the way to the Pune airport, sits the Aga Khan Palace. Built in 1889 by Sultan

[533] The practice of *gurubhakti* (devotion to the *guru*) is attested as early as the Upaniṣadic period. See, for example, Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad 6.23. However, though the practice of *gurubhakti* continued to evolve as demonstrated by Kṛṣṇa's instructions to Arjuna in the Bhagavad Gītā, fullfledged *guru* worship does not appear in the literature until the latter half of the first millennium with the rise of both *tantra* and *bhakti* traditions. See Mlecko 1982.

Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III as a philanthropic project to aid the poor in the neighborhood, it later become the site of Gandhi's infamous house arrest from August 1942 to May 1944. It is here, while in captivity, that both Gandhi's beloved wife, Kasturba Gandhi, and his secretary, Mahadev Desai, passed away. The ashes of both are interred in separate but matching pedestals, referred to as *samādhi*s, in a small garden on the southeast portion of the estate. Similarly, some twenty kilometers south of Pune on the Pune-Solapur Highway sits Rajbaug, the estate of the late Indian film star Raj Kapoor. (1924-1988) Here, in a meandering hall honoring the extensive film career of one of India's most beloved actors, is another pedestaled container, referred to as a *samādhi*, that houses the ashes of the deceased celluloid hero. As these examples show, in modern India the term *samādhi* has become a broader term that may be used to designate the memorial marker of the mortuary remains of revered figures, regardless of their spiritual attainment. However, the practices of ritual worship and *darśan* are reserved for those *samādhi* shrines that are held to house the living presence of a realized sage such as Jñāneśvar, for it is this perceived presence that is ritually engaged.

Though most *samādhi* shrine ritual is given Hindu expression, as has been mentioned, there remain striking similarities between the *samādhi* and *dargāh* traditions. Both traditions are focused on spiritual teachers (*pīr*/*guru*) responsible for the guidance of their individual disciples. Though learned, their authority is grounded in direct experience, which serves to verify the textual tradition to which they each adhere. Both are said to radiate a special divine power (*baraka*/*śakti*) that is beneficial

to all who come in contact with it. This power is also the source of miraculous expressions (*karāmat*/*siddhi*) that further serve to identify the special status of these sages. Both may have resided in an institutional community (*khānqāh*/*āśrama*) of which they were considered the head authority. These community settings were equipped with a kitchen for feeding the needy as well as guests. It is customary in both traditions to adhere to the ritual of gift exchange between guest and the spiritual teacher—one out of gratitude (*futūḥ*/*dakṣiṇa*), the other as a blessing (*ta'wīdh*/*prasād*). Upon the death of such beings, the power associated with them is believed to continue to radiate from their burial site and subsequently is the cause for the development of a ritual worship tradition focused on visitation to the burial site. Though both *dargāhs* and *samādhi* shrines adhere to a daily ritual schedule, there are special times when the radiating power of the tomb is understood to be heightened and thus more beneficial. The most significant day of the week for visiting a *dargāh* or a *samādhi* shrine is Thursday (*gurudvar*), which is revered as "*guru*'s day." As such, Thursday evenings are most often set aside for the singing of love poetry to God (*qawwālī*s/*bhajan*s) in honor of the buried sage. Festival days associated with their individual tradition (Muslim/Hindu) are also observed, with the most important annual festival being the death date anniversary of the particular *pīr*/*guru* ('*urs*/*mahāsamādhi*).[534] This day is celebrated as the most auspicious and grand time of the year for visitation and celebration.

[534] In the Sufi tradition, the '*urs* festival celebrates the saint's eternal union in marriage with God at death. In the Hindu traditions, the *mahāsamādhi* festival celebrates the saint's great absorption into the absolute at death.

Samādhi shrine worship in Maharashtra is not limited to the Vārkarīs. There is a vast network of *samādhi* shrines that, while embracing the various Vārkarī poet-saints, has expanded over the last century to include several revered modern *guru*s. By far the most well know among these shrines is the *samādhi* shrine of Sai Baba of Shirdi (d. 1918), whose worship extends far beyond the borders of Maharashtra. Sai Baba was another figure who blurred the distinction between Muslim and Hindu. As an example of his popularity, one only has to look to a survey of tourist sites in Maharashtra conducted by the Maharashtra Tourism Development Corporation. This survey covered the month of December, 2011, and determined that his *samādhi* shrine in Shirdi was the most visited site in all of Maharashtra, attracting 1.3 million *darśan*-seeking visitors in a single month.[535] Other prominent figures on the Maharashtrian *samādhi* circuit include Swami Samartha of Akkaḷkoṭ (d. 1878) and Bhagavan Nityananda (d. 1961) of Ganeshpuri, along with his main disciple, Swami Muktananda (d. 1982), who is interred just down the road from his beloved *guru*. In addition, there is the *samādhi* of the chillum-smoking Gajanan Maharaj (d. 1910) in Shegaon, as well as many other *guru*s of regional fame.

The practice of *samādhi* worship is not limited to Maharashtra. Indeed, it spans the length and breadth of the Indian subcontinent. There are several well-established *samādhi* sites worth mentioning here. Near the town of Mantralaya in Andhra Pradesh, there is a small island in the middle of the Tungabhadra River. On this island, called Navabṛndavan, is a compound containing the *samādhi* sites of nine

[535] Madaan 2012.

*guru*s in the Mādhva lineage, the most revered being that of Vyāsatīrtha, a sixteenth-century *guru* reputed to have had much influence with the court of Vijayanagara.[536] These *samādhi* markers are not encased in a shrine or temple structure but are rather left in the open air and are made up of tiered structures reminiscent of Jñāneśvar's *samādhi* marker. However, they are larger, have sculpted reliefs playing across the successive tiers, and are capped by a planter in which grows a tulasi plant, perhaps as a sectarian marker.[537]

In Tamil Nadu, the *samādhi* site of the great Vaiṣṇava theologian Rāmānuja (d. 1137) is located within the massive temple compound of Śrīraṅgam. Hagiographical accounts speak of Rāmānuja directing the sculpting of his own *mūrti*, into which he is said to have entered and attained *saṃjīvan samādhi*, much like Jñāneśvar. I was told by a Śaiva *saṃnyāsin* about his experience of receiving Rāmānuja's *darśan*. He had visited Śrīraṅgam on a pilgrimage tour of Tamil Nadu in the late 1980s. After taking *darśan* of Raṅganātha (Viṣṇu), his brahmin hosts asked him if he wanted to receive Rāmānuja's *darśan*. The *saṃnyāsin* was startled, as he had never heard that Rāmānuja had been buried at the temple compound. He was then led into a small side shrine where the sculpted *mūrti* of Rāmānuja sat. As he approached, the *pūjārī* removed the crown of the *mūrti*'s head to reveal a skull. Rāmānuja's skull containing the *prāṇa* full of his merit that he left behind at the moment of his final ascension is held to be encased inside the *mūrti*. The *saṃnyāsin*

[536] Valerie Stoker forthcoming.

[537] The honoring of the tulasi plant is related to the worship of Viṣṇu/Kṛṣṇa.

placed his forehead on the skull in humble reception of the great theologian's *darśan*, which he claims induced in him such a blissful state that he had to be assisted in leaving the temple compound.

In Vṛndavan, the land of Kṛṣṇa located in Uttar Pradesh, the very land itself is recognized by Kṛṣṇa *bhakta*s as the manifestation on earth of Kṛṣṇa's eternal abode. As such, the entire landscape is revered as an embodiment of Kṛṣṇa. Across this sacred landscape of temples and *tīrtha*s runs a network of *samādhi* shrines marking the burial spots of the revered Gosvāmins of the Gauḍiya Vaiṣṇava tradition. Many of them are enshrined within structures reminiscent of the *haveli* temple style.

How is the role of the *guru* conceived in each of these traditions, all of which have developed *samādhi* shrines to venerate certain *guru*s? The Vārkarī tradition's veneration of Jñāneśvar as *mūrti* and his tomb as temple reflects Jñāneśvar's own nondual philosophy, which is Vaiṣṇava in orientation with Śaiva inflections. Yet the Mādhva *guru*s in Andhra Pradesh, Rāmānuja in Śrīraṅgam, and the Gauḍiya Gosvāmins in Vṛndavan all adhered to competing Vaiṣṇava philosophical schools. Vyāsatīrtha and his companions adhered to the Dvaita (dualism) school of their founder, Madhva. Rāmānuja, on the other hand, is renowned for his elucidation of Viśiṣṭādvaita (qualified nondualism), in refutation of the Advaita (nondual) system expounded by Śaṃkara. The Gauḍiya Gosvāmins developed their own distinctive philosophy, which they characterized as Acintyabhedābheda (inconceivable difference in nondifference). As with Jñāneśvar, it is the ontological status ascribed to the *guru* that dictates the manner in which devotees draw meaning from their

interactions with the *guru*'s perceived presence in the space. Thus, the nuanced philosophical differences that distinguish these traditions must give rise to differing conceptions of the *guru* who is embodied as a living presence in his tomb-shrine.

On a hill across the river from the famed Paśupatināth Temple in Kathmandu, Nepal, is a complex of shrines, many of which mark the resting-place of revered Nāth Yogīs. The hill is called Mṛgasthalī in reference to the local myth of Śiva hiding here from his wife Pārvatī in the form of a deer (*mṛga*). The *samādhi* shrines located on the hill are of the step-pyramid style stone markers, each with a *liṅga* installed on the top tier. However, the contemporary Nāth tradition associated with this site resembles more the small esoteric groups gathered around revered *guru*s, discussed earlier, than it does the tradition of Jñāneśvar. Although Jñāneśvar traced his lineage back to Matsyendranāth and Gorakṣanāth, the founding *guru*s of the Nāth tradition, through his *guru* Nivṛttināth, he himself was the founding *guru* of a huge devotional movement. Moreover, while philosophically the *samādhi* shrine tradition of Jñāneśvar has clear similarities to the early textual tradition of the Nāth Yogīs, most contemporary Nāths are not familiar with these early texts and many do not espouse their nondual perspective.[538] In this regard, it would be interesting to see what differences there are between Jñāneśvar's *bhakti* tradition and the Nāth tradition centered on the *samādhi* shrines of Mṛgasthalī Hill in Kathmandu. What role does

[538] On modern Nāth familiarity with early Nāth texts, see Muñoz 2012. The aversion of the nondual position of early Nāth texts by contemporary Nāths was emphasized to me by David Gordon White, personal communication, March 2014.

gurubhakti play in this tradition, and to what extent is the memory of the Nāth *guru*s buried there preserved in the worship practices associated with their *samādhi* shrines?

Our analysis of Jñāneśvar's *samādhi* compound in Āḷandī has helped us begin to unpack the development of Hindu *samādhi* burial practice and its blossoming into a shrine worship tradition stimulated by a swelling vernacular devotional movement. More specifically our analysis teased out the particular ways in which Jñāneśvar's perspective on the role of the *guru* influences the ritual interactions with his perceived presence in the space allowing his devotees to worship his *samādhi* marker as a type of *mūrti* and his shrine to function as a kind of temple. *Samādhi* shrine complexes such as Jñāneśvar's, sustained over centuries by the collective memory and institutional framework of a broad-based devotional community such as the Vārkarīs, function in a similar manner to temple compounds such as the Mīnākṣī-Sundareśvara Temple and the Viṭṭhal Temple, and in this way develop particular mythico-historical personalities of place centered on the buried bodies of particular realized *guru*s. As we have seen in the case of Jñāneśvar, this personality is expressed in and through his *samādhi* compound in Āḷandī and is the driving force at the root of any devotee's encounter with the space. Since Jñāneśvar's body functions as a *mūrti* and his *samādhi* shrine as a temple, we are able to witness through our exploration of his *samādhi* compound many resonances with our other two case studies in Madurai and Paṇḍharpur. In all three cases, each tradition utilizes collective memory to reconcile the paradoxes of its existence—be they philosophical, theological, mythical,

historical, local, or translocal—for nowhere, I would argue, are such paradoxes more apparent or more creatively reconciled than in the sacred space of any given tradition.

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